

# **A Celebration of Cultures:**

**Oral Histories from the Catawba Valley**

**Part of the  
Building Community From Diversity  
Project**

Bennett Judkins, Building Community from Diversity Director

Lucy H. Allen, Community Oral History Project Director

Jeffrey Gordon Mauck and Lawrence B. Smith, Editors

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# A Note from the Project Director:

A few years back, when the Building Community from Diversity Project was just beginning to be written as a grant proposal, I met Professor Bennett Judkins in the Department of Sociology at Lenoir-Rhyne College, and we began talking about multiculturalism in our region. Working as a folklorist, I found we shared a love of and respect for different cultures, but differed in our approach. Ben mentioned the notion of an oral history component—it wasn't in the original plan, but a number of people had endorsed the idea while the project was in the planning stages. So Ben included a component to have a course taught at Lenoir-Rhyne to get students to collect oral histories and to open the course to members of the community.

I loved the idea, but pointed out that 1) a lot of people in this region, especially from working-class families and from immigrant communities wouldn't dare set foot on a college campus, and 2) most people wouldn't have time for a semester-long course. Why not do "quick and dirty" oral history training out in the community, and let the people in the different communities in the four counties do their own oral histories? The quality may not be as high, but the variety would be greater, and we would empower them to collect their own stories and history. That was the beginning of the Community Oral History Project. Ben included a course at Lenoir-Rhyne funded largely by the grant from Z. Smith Reynolds and secured additional funding from the North Carolina Humanities Council for the community project.

Ben, Carolyn Huff of the History Department, Louise Judd and I began discussing the project, later to be joined by Jeff Mauck. Jeff taught a semester-long class at Lenoir-Rhyne, and two of the interviews here are from that class. We offered five workshops to teach community members how to do oral history interviews, and had participants in Catawba, Caldwell, and Alexander Counties, and in Hickory. The workshops were led by me and by Kathryn Newfont, a graduate student in the Southern Oral History

Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We had a total of about 35 participants, ranging in age from middle school to senior adults. Many discovered how time-consuming the process is, and as a result, we ended up with 19 completed interviews that were of a high-enough sound recording quality to use.

I do want to point out, though, that many of the participants who did not contribute to this project were grateful for learning the skills, and many plan to use them at some point; many for documenting family histories. Therefore, I feel the workshops were an unqualified success.

Because both the interviewers and narrators were volunteers, giving of their time and sharing their lives, the lengths and qualities of the interviews vary greatly. All of the people who contributed to the interviews deserve great credit and thanks. In addition, the selection provided here is in no way statistically representative of the diversity. It does give a sampling of the patchwork of cultures in this region, and a glimpse into lives past and present.

In addition to the people mentioned above, great appreciation goes to Alisha Hutchinson, who transcribed most of the interviews, to Lisa Jennings of Austin Graphics for the layout and to Phil Minor and Minors Printing. Thanks also to Jeff Mauck and Lawrence B. Smith for their editing. Also to the Hiddenite Center staff, especially dwaine c. cole, Executive Director, Karen Walker, Administrative Assistant, and Jenny Patterson, Finance Officer, for their support and assistance in this project. Much gratitude also to the staff at the NC Humanities Council, especially Alice Barkley and Harlan Gradin for their generosity and patience.

Lucy H. Allen  
Folklorist, Hiddenite Center



# Introduction

Building Community from Diversity is a multi-part program designed to create dialogue among the culturally diverse populations of the area known in North Carolina as the Unifour or the Catawba Valley — Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties. Its participants seek to create dialogue and interaction to explore and analyze their differences as well as similarities, with the ultimate goal of creating a more tolerant and harmonious community. The project was funded in part by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, the North Carolina Humanities Council, the Hickory Community Relations Council, and the Catawba County Council of the Arts. Additional support was provided by the Hiddenite Center, Inc., and Lenoir-Rhyne College.

This volume of published oral histories represents a key component of the program. During 1999, under the direction of Lucy Allen of the Hiddenite Center, volunteers conducted interviews with over twenty individuals. The subjects of the interviews are a truly diverse cross section of the Catawba Valley: white, black, Asian and Hispanic. Some subjects were quite affluent, others middle-class, and a few came from the ranks of the working poor. All the respondents were adults; but some were barely past adolescence and others were quite elderly. Some of the subjects had spent their entire lives in the Catawba Valley, while several were recent immigrants. Most are heterosexuals, but at least two subjects are gay.

Publication of the oral histories follows the completion of three other important components of the program. A second component of the project was to gather different groups together in diverse conversations. During 1999 and early 2000 participants engaged in a series of “conversations”—face-to-face meetings to get to know one another, air grievances, find the similarities among themselves, and hopefully create a better understanding of what their community is about and where it should be going.

A third component consisted of study groups that brought people together to read literature and social commentary about cultural diversity in America. As project director Dr. Bennett Judkins of Lenoir-Rhyne College has stated: “It is important that we not only talk about cultural diversity, we must study it as well.” One group studying literature from different cultures met at Hickory’s Patrick Beaver Library during fall 1998 and the second looking at social issues met at Hickory’s Ridgeview Library during spring 1999.

A fourth component was a series of public celebrations of diversity held in Hickory for three days in March 1999 and for one day in Lenoir in March 2000. Music, dance, crafts and food were shared with the greater community, and during the 1999 celebration, local school groups participated, bringing the youth into the learning process.

The oral histories are a vital part of this whole process because as published material, they will allow generations to come to better understand the demographic changes that transformed the Catawba Valley in the 1990s. Furthermore, the publication can be distributed across the state to allow comparative analysis with other areas. There is clearly a need for a study of this kind; for presently one of four North Carolinians is a minority member, the largest group being African Americans. Over the past decade, however, the Catawba Valley has witnessed a large influx of Asians and Hispanics. The Hispanic population alone has increased by over 500% in the last five years. Some textile, furniture, and chicken processing companies have over 25% of their workforce made up of Asians and Hispanics. Catawba Valley educators face a special challenge to accommodate a much more diverse student population. In 1990 Catawba County schools had only 66 students who had limited English speaking proficiency; but by 1995 the number was 505, mostly Hispanics from Mexico and Central America and Hmong from Southeast Asia. In Burke



County the change was even more dramatic, from 25 students with limited English proficiency in 1989 to 985 by in 1995, most of the newcomers being Guatemalans and Hmong. Change has not been limited to ethnic groups. Though exact numbers are hard to establish, there is a sizable and growing gay and lesbian population in the Catawba Valley, particularly in Hickory.

These oral histories tell us much about the lives of the newcomers, as well as the experiences of long-time residents. In the following pages will be found the voices of the Catawba Valley—diverse and dynamic.

A note on editing:

Many of the people who conducted the oral histories were volunteers. Overall they did a wonderful job. Nevertheless the interviews tended to be of varying quality. We have been forced to cut some very long interviews. At other times unintelligible phrases words or dialogue that was drifting off the subject had to be cut and in a couple of cases we were unable to transcribe the interview due to poor tape quality. For the majority we have left the responses unaltered. Also, the respondents have been allowed to speak in their own vernacular. Language is an integral part of culture, and the way people speak tells us a great deal about them and their place in society. Complete interview transcripts and tapes will be deposited in the special collections at the Rudisill Library at Lenoir-Rhyne College where they will be available for future research.

— Jeffrey G. Mauck



# **Working-Class Families in the Catawba Valley**

## **Roy Gragg interviewed by Rachel “Susie” Barkley**

Roy Gragg tells a wonderful story of how a Catawba County working-class family held together through tough times in the 1930s and 1940s.

Susie Barkley: Ok, today is January the seventh and it is 11:45 and this is Roy Gragg, from Highway 16 South in Taylorsville, North Carolina.

RG: Yeah.

SB: And, Roy has consented to do an oral history for us. Roy is going to tell us about the first memory that he has of his family. Your earliest memory, go ahead Roy.

RG: It goes back probably in the 1930's when I first remember my people and uh, I was born in Catawba County to Ralph and Irene Gragg, and we had uh, I had two sisters, one Thelma and one Deloris they called her Ducky, she wobbled and that's the reason we called her Ducky.

SB: (laughing) Ok.

RG: And uh, that's my first remembrance, was probably in about 1934 or somewhere in that neighborhood and I can go back and remembering everything.

SB: And you would have been about how old?

RG: I would have been about six years old at that time.

SB: OK, were you in school?

RG: Ah, yes ma'am.

SB: What, what school did you go to?

RG: I went to Highland School in Hickory, North Carolina.

SB: Ok, well now give me some more information about your mom and dad, what did they do, how did they support you?

RG: Ah, my mother was uh, my mother she sewed uh,

cloth for a furniture factory for chairs and stuff like that, uh, it was Hickory Chair Company at that time. My father, he uh, worked there and also as an upholsterer. And back at that time, they called what they used [spit tacks], they didn't use staples like they do today. And I believe an upholsterer would make about forty dollars every two weeks.

SB: And supported a family.

RG: Supported a family, we raised our own hogs and we had cattle and chickens and things around.

SB: Did you say what section of Hickory?

RG: Highland area.

SB: Ok.

RG: At that time, it was not in the city limits. It's down near Shuford Mill off of uh, oh it used to be old 70 that went through there, we lived on a place called Crest Street right near the, used to be uh at that time they built a, several years later, they built a first Tabernacle Baptist Church right there where we lived.

SB: That's still there.

RG: It's, it's a different place, though.

SB: And you went to school then at one of the Elementary schools close by.

RG: Yes ma'am, yes, we walked to school back then and carried our own lunch or went home for lunch.

SB: Ok, when you took your lunch, what did you take?

RG: Um, mostly peanut butter and crackers or peanut butter sandwich, something like that we didn't have the modern stuff like light bread and stuff then, we took biscuits.

SB: Ok. Did you have grandparents that lived close by?

RG: Uh, I had one that lived on Sandy Ridge Road, that's not too far away. But uh, then my other grandfamily my grandmother... on my mother's side, she was a Huffman. My other uh, grandparents lived in what the place called Windy City at that time, it's Viewmont now.

SB: When you went to see your grandparents, how did you get there?

RG: We walked.

SB: Oh, you didn't have a car?

RG: Well my Dad had one it was a little later on.

SB: Ok, so you walked from.

RG: Highland to Sandy Ridge Road.

SB: What is the first remembrance you have of school?

RG: Probably uh, I remember school mostly was in uh, I think I remembered the first grade some because we had a lady teaching then, Ms. Adderholt and uh, I liked her, she was a good teacher. She was a teacher that you know, had a way with people, she taught some uh, music too also in the later years in school. And uh, I knowed that back then if you had a problem or something you, you, uh, in school, the teachers would spank you ... then when we went home we got another spanking. I remember that.

SB: Describe your classroom, do you remember your classroom, the first grade room?

RG: Yes, I.

SB: You haven't thought about it in years.

RG: No, not really. I don't, I just know that it was uh, the school is still there, it's been turned into something else, I think it's a sort of a recreation thing now, but it had a blackboard on it just the old timey desks where we sit

one behind each other, I remember that. And uh, that you uh, went in each morning when you were done you had to uh, pledge allegiance to the flag and stuff like like, like that that you do and uh, I believe at that time they had uh, I don't remember exactly, but I know later years I do remember that they used to have prayer in school, but now, they don't, they don't have that now. Pledge allegiance was what may have been one of our big thing[s], I mean that, that made you proud. I remember that... But I don't think they were like we have today, I mean just the forty-eight star flag.

SB: Ok, describe uh, your home at that time, what did your house look like?

RG: Well, we lived uh, on a place called Crest Street, it's uh, I think we had about a five room house, it was um, when we first moved there, my mother and dad bought it, I think they gave about eighteen hundred dollars for it if I remember correctly. And uh, around the kitchen it had all glass windows all the way around but they done away with that when they lost so much heat, we heated, we cooked on a wood stove, one called, it had a reservoir on the side of it, that's how you heat your water. We didn't have a bathroom because we weren't in the city limits. Had a front porch on it, it was a ground level. And we didn't have a basement but we had a basement door so we dug our own basement and uh, took the basement out and we were surrounded around the sides, it was dirt and it was cemented. And on the side, it left a bank up on it and they took stuff like potatoes and stuff on it and put lime on it and that's how you saved your potatoes in the wintertime even all year long to have potatoes.

SB: Did you put any paper down first?

RG: Well we put paper, I think, if I remember correctly we put paper on, I'm not sure, because I think they had some boards down too.

SB: Bet you put some, what else did you put down there?

RG: And um, oh they put all kind of canned stuff, used to have. And uh, years later they put us in the city limits and we uh, had to put in a bathroom, took part of the back

porch we had a back porch on it and it was about, oh, eight ten foot high and we had under the porch where we kept the wood to keep it dry for uh, cooking and heating and uh, but uh, then in 1944, my mother passed away in that house.

SB: So she was?

RG: Yeah, she was just 37 years old at that time, yeah, me and my two sisters, we lived there for, till I was old enough to go into the services with my father and uh, I went in the service when I was seventeen.

SB: Did your father never marry again?

RG: Oh yeah, he married uh, remarried and that, to a lady, and she was a good woman, but they didn't get along and then me and him didn't get along at that time...

SB: Typical, right?

RG: So I just went into the service, I was, I was seventeen years old.

SB: When you were living in that house with your sisters, you had jobs, didn't you?

RG: Oh yeah, we had to uh, each, each person, after my mother passed away, I had a sister, my younger sister, she was nine, I believe it was. And she learned to bake bread, my other sister, she done the cooking. We just did our own thing, we worked or we had to get wood in, we had to take care of uh, if we had pigs, we had to feed the pigs, we had to feed the cow, we had an old cow, milk and stuff like that. We just done our own.

SB: Ok, still went to school.

RG: And then, went to school and uh, we had rabbit traps out, we set rabbit traps and we would look at them in the morning. Catch something, we would sell it, just whatever, you know.

SB: Ok, we're gonna continue with Mr. Gragg here, and talk about some more of his memories of his school

days, let's start back with school days.

RG: Ok, when I went to school, like I said before, we went to Highland school and it was um, at that time, I believe it was through the seventh grade and I remember the school rooms were hard floors and you'd oil the floors, you didn't have like they have now, the tile and stuff, they was [oil] on the floors, and they uh, had radiators for heat. Water would run through. And we used to go to school barefooted in the summer time. And we'd go uh, we didn't wear the shoes because we didn't, we couldn't afford them. And uh, in the winter time we'd wear old [brogan] shoes, that uh, we didn't have no polish or nothing on them, not stained or nothing and they had a steel plate on the heel. And when we went home from school, we had to change clothes because those same clothes, we wore back the next day. I mean, they were clean clothes, we couldn't, we couldn't get them dirty because that, that was part of our life at that time. And they had to last you. Now I remember that at school very well and uh, I know that uh, that schools was a well, you go to one room and you stayed in that room most of the day and maybe you'd go into another room for geography, they called it geography back then. Had music classes, we had uh, arithmetic at the time, just like uh, any ordinary school back then, in that day, in those days, but it was small school, we didn't have big crowds, and uh, we didn't have no trouble in school because if you did, you got, you got spanked pretty good, like I said before, when we went home, we got a whooping too on top of that.

SB: What, you just took it for granted that you didn't misbehave.

RG: You just didn't misbehave at all because that was, that was a no-no.

SB: You said you took your lunch or you went home, I believe.

RG: Yes, yes, we got to carry our lunch, most, a lot of times and then we would run home, we'd run all the way home from school because we wasn't that far from school. We'd maybe take us, uh, maybe ten minutes to get home and ten minutes to get back and that would just allow us a few minutes to eat so we could have a little bit,

play ball a little bit at the school lunch time.

SB: Baseball?

RG: Uh yeah, we played amongst, we'd have sides and just play baseball amongst ourselves and now we didn't have teams like uh football, now we didn't know what football was, but we played cow pasture football when we got home, or something like that, when we had time.

SB: The teachers, um, were from right around that neighborhood?

RG: Most of us was from that neighborhood or um, the hometown was where they was raised at.

SB: Ok.

RG: We had uh, several teachers uh, uh, I know uh, I remember several of them well, we had Mr. Gilbert and he taught for years. And I remember he didn't die for oh, it's been maybe twenty years, but he was uh, one of our, he was our geography teacher, and uh you listened to him and you learned. I mean, you didn't uh, we didn't have a great thing like they had today, like computers and stuff, but we learned a lot of things that uh, and uh, my poor subject was writing. I couldn't write worth a flip, never could, I still can't.

[Mr. Gragg continues to discuss his school days]

RG: We even had choir and uh, yeah...and they drove us up to the radio station, take us uptown to the radio station and we'd sing on the radio station once in a while.

SB: Now how far were you from town then?

RG: We was about uh, four, four or five miles from town where we were, at that time. You see we wasn't in the city limits until later years.

SB: Did you use a bus to go to town ?

RG: No, we walked. Oh to school?

SB: Uh uh.

RG: Oh, they'd take you in cars.

SB: In cars, ok.

RG: Had to go in cars or take you in like um, I can't remember some of it, I know that uh, that old Essex and old uh, '37 Ford and things like that to where, that's what the people had and that's what we used to go to places. And I don't remember ever riding a bus. When I went to, after I got through that school I went to, uh, went to what they called junior high, it's Green Park at that time, where I went, it was about, the other side of Hickory from where I lived, it was probably oh, six, seven miles from there and the way we would go to it was most of the time somebody would take us or we'd have to walk, we didn't have buses to go. And I finished the eighth grade and uh, when I finished the eighth grade, that's when my mother passed away and I went one half a year and uh, uh, ninth grade, and then I quit and went to work. I wasn't old enough to work at that time and uh, my mother had worked for this man for years and he had started a business. He let me work for them and paid me across the table and uh, back then, uh, they could do that, forty cents an hour and I'd learned to spring up, I was about uh, 15, I guess at the most at that time. And before that, I did work on the farm and uh in the summer time a little bit uh, some of these younger people and we got a dollar a week and our meals. And uh, that was good money to us. And I remember I took and I saved mine and bought me a bicycle, paid twenty five dollars for it and uh, so I rode that bicycle too, to school.

SB: If you had that bicycle now, it'd be worth a lot.

RG: Oh yeah. Then our life, life was hard, but it was a good life, I mean, I really, I appreciated it and I think today, I appreciate it more because of, of the things that we had to go through and what I learned. And uh, than the kids do now because they, they've got everything give to them most of the time, but we had to work for everything we had.

SB: Skipping on up, uh, you went to work, uh you said



you were seventeen I believe when you went into the service?

RG: Yes.

SB: What uh, branch of the service did you go into?

RG: I was seventeen, I joined up one morning, uh, my dad wouldn't sign for me, we had piddled around and messed around, he finally signed, said he would sign for me, and I, I got the papers and brought them home and he signed them and took 'em back to um, to uh, to the recruiting office and it was in an old post office in Hickory at the time. And I, that morning, that was morning and they put us on a bus and took us to Lenoir, and uh, filled out some more papers and we got on another bus and we went to Lenoir to Ft. Bragg, NC and to be sworn in, we swore in and I, I left there Ft. Bragg and went and joined the Army. And uh, went to Seattle Washington, Ft. Lewis to take basic training and we got through basic training well they, uh, they put us over in the barracks in Ft. Lewis Washington over there where we had to get to for overseas assignment. And uh, we could have come home, I had a fourteen day leave, but I didn't have the money to come home on, I didn't, we didn't draw but uh, seventy-five dollars a month in the service at that time.

SB: And what year was this?

RG: This was 1947.

SB: So the war was over.

RG: The war was over, but then, uh, I just reported in, then they, they just sent us overseas, I went to Japan and didn't know, it was a different time, I went in the first cav [sic] division the first time and they moved me from there to the, after I got through the basic training uh, over there, they put us on a special assignment and I went to work for the military government, I worked for [a] civilian. Uh, he was uh, setting up these schools and things in Japan at that time. They were destroying old books that they had from the previous days, you know when Hirohito had it.

SB: So this was occupied Japan.

RG: Yeah occupied, yeah, and then we was over, and uh, out in the outskirts, we were probably a hundred and fifty miles from the nearest troops they was about twenty-four of us, that's all that was there at the little old area we stayed in. And some times they would get hostile. Then um, after we got through with that, they sent me to the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry division. I stayed there till my time was up and I was discharged and I got back home and I was discharged at the same place I was went from, Seattle Washington, Ft. Lewis, at that time. Come home, stayed home a few weeks, got lonesome, didn't know where, didn't know what to do and I reenlisted, went back in for six more years, and uh, that just, they just went back in, I went in that time in the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division.

SB: So you, did you jump?

RG: Yes. I made several jumps. Where you had basic training, we took our jump school at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

SB: Oh.

RG: They had a jump school there at that time, that's when the Korean War started and they needed troops to go to Korea. And they formed the 187<sup>th</sup> Airborne outfit to go to Korea. Just different things happened over the years and uh, I spent my six years and I got married in the meantime and in the service, she didn't like it. And I went back overseas again I was in Germany for about three years. And when I come home, they sent me to Fort Hood, Texas and my wife went there with me, we stayed there till time to get out and she said either to get out or divorce.

SB: Is she from here?

RG: She's from Taylorsville.

SB: Ok, and yeah, you are too now so, yeah.

RG: That's about my story

SB: Okay.

RG: And you know, well life just, I went to school... I didn't have a high school education and I still don't, but I went to uh, Catawba Tech for a while, I went, also, I took on the job training at the Swofford's that used to be here in town. And uh, that's where I got my break at, and uh, Mr. Swofford said they, didn't nobody have an education and he gave me a job in the recap shop and uh, they moved it, one of the men had to go in the service, they draft him in and they asked me I wanted to help upstairs, that was selling and collecting and stuff and I said I don't have an education and he said well, he said he worked over the years and got uh, he went to... college but he said that common sense had a lot to do with it so he give me a break and give me a chance to do the job. And I started out that way.

SB: So you worked all those years at Swofford's there?

RG: I worked there about thirteen years,

SB: Thirteen.

RG: Between twelve and thirteen years.

SB: Okay.

RG: And I went, then I left there and went to work at Hickory at a tire service and uh, worked in the recap shop over there for a while and then they gave me a chance to manage a store, worked assistant manager of a store down on Springs Road and, then they moved, and one of the men quit at the main store and they gave me a chance to work as manager of a store. And of course I took it.

SB: Oh, sure.

RG: And uh, I went to Catawba Tech to a credit school and at that time, a lawyer by the name of Oliver Noble was uh, teaching. He taught uh, credit and collections and things and stuff at the Catawba Tech. And later on, he came to be a judge, you probably know of him, he's still a judge as far as I know.

SB: Mm, okay.

RG: And I finally worked there 'til I twenty six years retired.

SB: Okay, well um, looking back, let's back back up then and see, um, what part of history do you relate to your life, this, when you were in Japan, say um, is that um, what, what, I mean I, I of course am old enough to remember the Korean War and I know that, so that was a traumatic part of history.

RG: Yeah, well at that time, I went to Japan, it was a, a country that was still hostile in a way to us and they hadn't uh, caves that they used to have and they, uh, had stuff stored in those caves and it took years to find all those caves and stuff and destroy all that stuff, they even had uh, fighter, uh, the Zero fighter planes stored in them, in pieces and where they could uh, put them together if they needed to, if, you know if things had worked out later on in life, as far as, but uh, the uh, education was at that time, a great thing for them and uh, you take today, they are one of the most educated countries in the world, I guess.

SB: I guess you still pay, you pay attention to them when you see them on the news since you've been there.

RG: Oh yeah.

SB: Did you learn any Japanese?

RG: I used to could speak some, but I've got to where over the years, I just, well nobody talked to me about it and I forgot it. I used to count with it and had some ability with it.

SB: Okay.

RG: We had uh, when I worked for civilian in the military, we had interpreters that would go with us, he could speak some Japanese, the man we worked for, but we had interpreters so wouldn't make sure that we had, we'd go in these school systems in different places... it



was like a county over there and we'd go to these counties and inspect the schools and we'd meet with the school officials and see if anything could be done to um, improve their education and this man was smart, he was a well educated man and he, now, he was a person that wanted to help the country get back on its feet and uh, I remember one area we went to, it was a little island right out, right off the coastal side of Korea, . . . and we had to go by boat and we couldn't take a large boat, you had to take a small boat to go to it and uh, we got over there and they had about two acres of farm land, they had about two hundred and fifty-sixty people on the island and they had a school there and it, they had a lot of children that was retarded because they married into their own families, a lot of them did. And uh, but I remember that very well because of, you know, the condition that some of the children were in. And I remember the farm land, they didn't have enough farm land hardly for the food, I mean, they uh, they survived, they made a living. But that time, that island, their main source of living was fishing. And they done a lot of fishing, they'd bring it back to the main land and sell it and stuff. But they still had their own schools and stuff.

SB: Compare, compare that, in your mind to what school was like here. You didn't have children at that time so you wouldn't have been aware of the schools.

RG: uh,

SB: But you'll remember from your own school days.

RG: I remember their schools were sort of like ours was in a way, their discipline, they were disciplined in their schools, they listened and they learned, they, they were eager to learn things. And uh, even in our schools at that time, we were, we were eager because we didn't, uh, that was uh, we had to go to school. And you could bet that, uh, one year, I remember, uh, lot of people quit school when they was like fifteen, sixteen years old back then because they, they had to go to work.

SB: Mmmm.

RG: And uh, that's why they survived, lot of them did, and

when the war came along, that changed things. People worked, they had, they could get good jobs, high paying jobs, what wasn't drafted or went into the service. . . I know, uh, my grandson had to register some years ago, but I didn't wait till I got old enough to register, I just joined up when I was old enough.

[Here Mr. Gragg recounts some of his childhood games]

SB: It is good to do it, though, don't you think, mean, to remember, to remember it uh.

RG: Cause now, we used to take, when we would go out to play in the evenings, we'd play marbles a lot, you know, shoot marbles on the ground and back then, you had the yard, it wasn't grassy like it is today, and you swept them and we played marbles and we played cow pasture football, we'd call it and we had, played a little ball when we got on Sundays and when we had, got a chance to, but one of the main things we used to play was, we called it Fox and Hound. And you'd choose up sides and somebody would be the fox and somebody would be the dogs, hounds and then they, we would try to chase each other down and you'd do it especially in the evenings late, or dark. And had this big old area around the area, area where we lived at, that's what they, we called it Shop Hill, there behind Hickory Chair over there and it, it wasn't growed up then and you, you could run all over the country. And not have no, there'd not be no danger or nothing. We had outside toilets and things then too, before we moved into the city limits, or before they city limits came in and got us. And, but we went to town, we walked to town and if we got to go anywhere, I remember my, if we wanted to go to town for anything, we get ten cents or fifteen cents, the movie cost you ten cents and you could buy a nickel's worth of kisses or candy is what they call it, kisses is what they called it. And it would last you all day. And we'd go on Saturday morning and see a movie. And uh, then we'd have to walk all the way back home, we'd walk, uh, we'd walk the railroad tracks because that was close to the house and that was the quickest way to town. Go up the railroad tracks.

SB: And you wouldn't get lost.

RG: Yeah.

SB: You'd know your way back.

RG: We didn't get to go much, if we just, we'd have to get permission to go and we had to work, I mean, if we didn't do our work, we couldn't go nowhere.

SB: Uh huh, you didn't have any choice. Uh, can you imagine your own grandson at that age striking out and walking to town, I, you know, it just doesn't work that way.

RG: No well, I, uh, I walked, you won't believe this but I walked several times, when I was working at Hickory, my old car would break down or something, I didn't have the money then to uh, and like for years, I walked halfway to Hickory from Taylorsville, sometimes.

SB: Well that, is that after you met Marie and...she's from Taylorsville, and from this area?

RG: Yeah.

SB: Okay. Mmm, yeah, you can do things when you think you can't.

RG: When I went to work, come out of the services, I worked for seventy-five cents an hour then.

[end interview]

## **Carrie Vanhorn interviewed by Helena Vanhorn**

In this interview Carrie Vanhorn tells us about growing up in family of agricultural laborers in the 1940s and early 1950s.

Helena Vanhorn: This is Helena Vanhorn, March 6, 1999, at the home of Carrie Vanhorn. Okay, you've mentioned before that your family grew up and you and your brothers and sisters had picked cotton as kids, um, what time period was that? How old were you or what years?

Carrie Vanhorn: I was five years old the first time I remember going to the cotton patch.

HV: Five years old?

CV: Because you had to, well, you had brothers and sisters but you couldn't stay home, there was nobody to leave you with, you know, your parents went to the cotton patch, so you had to, you had to go. Everybody had to go to the cotton patch. You slept under the shade tree or on the edge of the cotton and daddy usually carried, carried one of us so he'd put you on his back and stick your feet in his overalls and put your arms around his neck. (laughing) And we'd go off to the cotton patch. Well at first, my dad was raised in Lincolnton and he left home when he was about fifteen or sixteen and he was just kind of tired of city life so, he came

HV: City life?

CV: City life. So he came to Hickory, he thumbed a ride and came to the edge of Lincoln County where it was the river by Catawba County. And he went on the farm for these people and their last name was Crouch, which was my great grandparents. He started farming for them, and that's where he learned to farm. And so [they were] my mom's, grandparents so she lived up the road about a mile, the same road. So that's how mom and dad met. But he came up and he liked my grandmother and they got along really good... So my grandma took him, kind of under her wing and uh, he would come up every day and she started showing him how to plant the garden. So he, he learned from her and he really, and he really, I mean every thing in season exact time everything and they both had green thumbs. So several years later then, him and

my mom were married and they moved to a little house... But then when they started having children, they always, well, they always took mom back to her momma's house. So I was actually born in the house that my momma lived in because they would go stay for at least a month and grandma would take care of us. So my great grandmother, her name was Kathryn. And I wondered up until about ten years ago where that name came from and... my middle name would be Kathryn, why my mom would name me such a name because I didn't really appreciate it. (laughing) So, so she said, did you not know where your name came from? And I said no, she said you was named after your grandmother. I said, oh I'm so sorry, I like my name now (laughing) and sure enough I appreciate it more now. And to come to find out mom's grandma, the same woman, delivered me, she was a midwife so she delivered me and I really appreciated her after that.

HV: Is that why you were named after her?

CV: Yeah, she uh, yeah, I think so. But I mean, we were just always around our, our grandparents, we were, you know, it was just uh I could say when we have, when momma would have her children and stuff, she would always go back there. So they always had a big farm, everybody farmed and that's just what we knew. Then we moved uh, about four miles from that house and well we lived there several years and then we moved on toward Mountain View... And that is the first time that I remember going to pick cotton. But you always had to go because there was, everybody went no matter the age because there wasn't anybody at home to leave you with. You didn't have a babysitter or, and since I was around five and my sister was seven so she, you know, we all went to the field. And uh, we put this, we made this sack with a strap on it is what it looked like and it was long and of course at five, they didn't make me pick cotton but I had to go to the field but you put this sack on and you went along the rows and you just reached in and pulled the cotton right out of the open bowl and put it in your

sack and when you got it full, you took it to the middle of the field where they would have a sheet or even at either end or the middle and then you would empty it out and go back and start on your row again. And it was very hot, it was very tiresome but we didn't really realize it back then. And the best part of that was going to a store which was about a half a mile away and getting my first Coca Colas... a six-ounce Coca Cola, after you had picked cotton like two in the afternoon, you would get a break... then go back to the field in about an hour or so and then the afternoons, you would get to go to the store and get your Coca Cola and to this day, that was my favorite drink.

HV: If you were, the babies they just left the little ones on the edge of the big blanket?

CV: I think grandpa had made it, a small bed type thing and either slept in there or sometimes, you just, Momma just put them on her back, you know, just like carried along with her. But most of the time they slept, you know, slept or played in the field. It does sound strange, don't it?

HV: And none of the kids ever wandered off?

CV: Never (laughing), never got snakebit, never got hurt never got injured but we were always there together.

HV: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

CV: I have four sisters and two brothers.

HV: And you were all picking cotton by the time you were what, what age?

CV: Well really picking cotton, you would go like, well probably start about six. When you first went to school, start picking cotton. And you had to hoe the cotton in the spring of course. And my dad always teased me because I had this big old hoe and I would always hoe more cotton out than you could look back and I hoed more of it out but the truth, the moral to that story is he said something to me in the spring but when we'd go back in the summer or fall to pick the cotton, dad took

that row because it didn't have as much cotton in it.

HV: He chose that one for himself.

CV: He did and I kidded him about that not long before he died. He, he always said, Carrie don't hoe all the cotton out but then when he got ready, ready to pick it, he chose the one. But he always went out, of course he got, most of the time he got out to the ends of the field before we did, but he always came back and helped us. Never did he, never did we have to pick one by ourselves, he always came back to help us.

HV: Were all the kids on one row or did you each have a row?

CV: We took, when we first started, you took the side, one side, you didn't have to do the whole thing because you see, you had to lean over. And our arms wasn't that long anyway. So my sister and I had a row together at first and then dad wouldn't leave us, wouldn't leave us out there, we asked him, we were, can't you come and help us? He'd sit out at the end of the row and smoke a, have part of a cigarette, and then he'd get up and here he'd come back... And one evening, dad sit down on the cotton sheets to smoke a cigarette. And my brother was a baby and he was laying on the sheet and my daddy struck the match and it caught the cotton fire. So mom had to grab the baby up and the cotton burned.

HV: Were the fields yours, did the fields belong to the family or?

CV: No, we had a Mr. [unintelligible] ask us back then, you just uh, if you didn't own, own land yourself, or own a farm yourself, then kind of ask around to see who, if somebody moved, they always had a renter house and if somebody moved out of that house to go some other place, you know then that would be open and this man would need somebody. So you,

HV: Your family moved?

CV: Yes.



HV: Wherever?

CV: Right. We moved several, we moved several times. We moved to Catawba when I was about eleven or twelve. Stayed one year. And dad, we had our cows down there in a barn for cows and dad had done helped milk some cows but we moved back to Mountain View, I guess because we liked it so good. Then we started, uh, after that we started raising uh, what's it called? Well just truck crops, what they call like vegetables, tomatoes, cucumbers, and that type of thing for another man and we lived in the middle of a great big field where there is a development now.

HV: Which development? Was it Suburban Meadows?

CV: Yes. We lived, that was all, that was all one big farm at one time. And we lived on that farm and raised um, well most of the time, we didn't have cotton back then but we raised corn and tomatoes and sold them and my dad went to um, Hickory and got a job. So he wasn't on the farm with us then. But uh, we did have a cotton patch there, we, we had that and the other vegetables because my brother and my sister, I was the older one then, my sister was two years younger and then my brother two years younger. One year, us three picked the first bale of cotton in Catawba County. They always like to put it in the paper, who got the first one.

HV: Oh.

CV: But you know what? They didn't put our names. They put the man who owned the land's name.

HV: Oh, so you didn't, you still didn't get credit.

CV: I still didn't get credit for it. And I told my mom about ten years go, I said mom, you know what? I still would like to ask that man why he didn't [put] our names in there just because we worked so hard. (laughing) She said Carrie, I don't think I'd bother with that now.

HV: (laughing) So when did, when you were moving from house to house, did you like sharecrop, you got a

percentage?

CV: You got so much money and then you had your house free, I mean you didn't have to pay rent, you didn't have to pay rent on the land, you didn't have to.

HV: Were there a lot of people or just one house usually on the...land?

CV: Well there was one on that but he had uh, some people on back over the road on another dirt road that helped him all the time too. So there was really several families that did his work because there was a lot of land, a lot of land.

HV: One time you mentioned that there were black families nearby.

CV: Yes, this was the place that the black families did live but it was on the dirt road not too far, it was like a mile from us. And every time we did anything, we were always sweet potatoes or whatever we were in the field, they were there. Like when you planted them, they were there, getting them ready. And I hope anybody ever heard of one of these, we had a sweet potato planter, it was a machine that two people ride, they had a seat for two people and one puts a sweet potato down, each one of them puts one. My mother and I rode that thing for like two or three hours at a time...the tractor pulled it, of course the tractor pulled it so we really didn't have to do anything but keep the potato slips a certain way on your lap so that you could just put one down and you didn't miss, it was like six or eight inches and we did that all day long. That was one of the most tiring jobs, I would rather pick cotton than do that. Then when the tomatoes got ready, you had to, two people had, you had to go pick the tomatoes and put them in baskets and then put them over into crates. And he was, he was always around but us and the black people usually did the, you know, did the work. But we worked side by side.

HV: And this was in the, what year?

CV: 50, 49 and 50?

HV: Long before desegregation?

CV: Yes, because I was fourteen.

HV: And you knew how a lot of people looked at black people?

CV: Yes.

HV: Did, did you all talk to them or just kind of work side by side?

CV: We just, there was, they were just, all we knew them as was our neighbors. They was just a common thing. You went to the house to get water.

HV: It never bothered you at all?

CV: It didn't, I just knew that our skin wasn't the same color but I just grew up knowing that these were, I mean these were people I was here with these people in the summer time and the spring and summer or up into the fall a lot more than I was with my friends even, like at church, they would go to church or Saturday afternoons, you would go visit somebody. But we were together like four or five days a week unless it was raining and we was doing something every day. So this was just a common thing for, for us.

HV: When you went to school, did you come home and work?

CV: Yes.

HV: In the fields afterwards?

CV: Yes we came home in the afternoons and worked and there [for] a couple years, it was very strange because the county even let us off several weeks to do the, to work the fields and cotton.

HV: Because you were farming families?

CV: Because we were farming family and the county did this...it has to be in the history somewhere...they let us

out because that was our job. I hadn't really thought about that lately but they did. Instead of a snow day, we had, you know.

HV: Did you have to make up that, did you have to make up that lost learning time?

CV: No, no. And we got along, we got along by. Everybody graduated.

HV: So when you missed school, did other kids know why you were missing school, was it a common thing?

CV: Yes...I think there was maybe a third of the school that did that.

HV: I know you told me before that you grew up poor but you didn't know that you were poor.

CV: No, I didn't, we all, we had the best food, nobody could have had any better food than what we did, we never were without a place to live, never without food. And never without our parents or the love of our parents...We did not own a car and the cousins, the uncles and grandpa would come after us, we always had a way to church. We'd go to church and then we would at least, at least every other Sunday, we ate with my grandma and she had, she had ten children, they did not always come home at the same time but grandma always cooked and then even in the afternoon, we would go back and eat leftovers before we went home. And I was thinking in the last several years, I don't ever, with all the children going in and out of her house, I don't ever remember her telling us not to slam the door. Never told us not to slam the screen door and you know that there was, she never did and grandpa didn't either. Grandpa would sit in the living room and most of the men would gather in there and after dinner, of course. Oh and one thing, I don't know if anybody knows this, we had, we would go out and get uh, kind of a brush, well grandpa made a thing that while you made sure that there was no flies in the house, we had kind of a brush that if any flies came in or something, you shooed them out. I mean you know, that was a no-no. You know, all the children were running in and out the doors at the same, you know, run

in and out the doors and if a fly would get out, you would have to chase the fly out. (laughing) We didn't want them out. That was the thing grandpa just couldn't stand was flies.

HV: You didn't know that you were poor so I'm assuming that within your schoolmates, pretty much everybody was about the same [level].

CV: Well, they owned, a lot of my schoolmates owned houses, I would go, I would walk to my house on a lot of weekends to visit them but nobody acted differently. Nobody acted different. We went to church together, we went to school together and the ones that worked in, in the fields, it was just, we were just so close I guess that we you know, if I was poor, I didn't know it... If I myself generally didn't own property, it didn't bother us, it didn't bother my classmates. They didn't, you know, they didn't mind. We never, we just didn't discuss it. And you always had money to go buy what else? When you got to, on up and toward high school, a poodle skirt and a pair of loafers like everybody else.

HV: So you didn't, you really didn't miss out on a lot of the things that your classmates had?

CV: No, we went to socials, we had, we would go, I would go stay all night with different people, they would come to my house and the one thing that was truly wonderful in this was that people asked me to come home with me because my mom was a magnificent cook. Plain ordinary dishes turned into wonderful tasting food. They asked me, sometimes I have three girls come home with me on Sunday.

HV: And your parents never had a problem with the extra people.

CV: Never, never. She'd get up on Sunday morning and put the food on, started cooking and then we'd go to church. And lot of times we walked. If my fifth, my fifth grade school teacher sometimes would come down the road and pick us up. She went to the same church. But see I didn't miss, I didn't care if I had to walk, it didn't matter. It was just fun. It was just a part of life I guess

we'd stepped into early. And my dad never drove until he was about well he bought a truck, when he was about fifty-five. And he never ever got his driving license but he drove that truck on the dirt roads. Drove it to the highway up to the road to catch a ride to work. But he just didn't care to, we just didn't have a vehicle. We never had a car the whole time I was in school. But we always went somewhere. We would go up to the road and sometimes dad would just stick out his thumb and somebody would just pick us up there and take us to town.

HV: With eight kids.

CV: Well, we all didn't go at the same time. Sometimes a couple of us would go and we'd go to church... But everybody knew dad. And then our house burned. When I was around eleven or twelve, our house burned. Dad got up, took my brother, was going to Hickory to get a haircut. This was close to Deerfield. Where Deerfield is now he just stuck out his thumb, caught a ride into town, was in the barber shop getting a hair cut and this man came in and said Paul, did you know that your house is burning? ... And one thing about that is, it was, it was terrible, it was devastating, uh, I picked up a flower pot on the screened in back porch and left a brand new iron sitting beside of me. But we went to my grandma's that night and uh, stayed all night with them for a couple of days. And that afternoon, the woman that taught our Sunday school class came and got the three of us girls, took us to Hickory, bought us all outfits, pajamas, underwear, everything herself. She took us back and then grandpa came and got us and we went down to his house and stayed until I think it was on a Tuesday or Wednesday that when we, the people of Mountain View rented us a house on the other road. Where Pittstown Road is. They paid the rent, three months rent, rented us a house and we had enough cans [of] food that you couldn't hardly walk through the kitchen floor. And uh, a furniture place, a man lived in Mountain View that he owned a furniture store. So he gave us four beds, a table, chairs, stove, refrigerator, all this silverware and dishes and the people in the community gave us blankets, things like that. So within five days of our house burning to the ground, we had enough material things, we had



enough to fill a house. We started moving in and in filled that house within five days.

HV: So you lost everything?

CV: We lost everything. Except a sewing machine which I let fall off the front porch and broke the drawer off of (laughing) . . . oh the Bible, I think we got some books off the back of the couch that was just burning.

HV: Did you all eight of you graduate from high school?

CV: No. (laughing) I was the first one graduated in my family.

HV: But you did get the opportunity to graduate from high school?

CV: Oh yes. My mom wanted everybody to. That's what all her and dad talked about. Just so you go to school, whatever you do after school, you can make up your mind, but you, I really want you to finish school

HV: Had good teachers?

CV: Yes. The teachers were so, the teachers were really good. And if it hadn't been for my English teacher, we had to, we had to have a, we had to repeat, memorize Shakespeare. And I memorized it but it, when I got up in front of the class, I couldn't remember it all, I was terrified to stand up in front of the class. So while she ate this big red apple, she would let, at lunch, she would let me sit at my seat and tell and recite it for her. And if it hadn't been for her, she gave me an A, if it hadn't been for that, I don't know if I would have passed that course. Everything else was fine but I just didn't want to get up in front of the class and tell this, because when I got up in front of the class, I got stage fright and I'd forget what I had learned.

HV: You are proud of all your kids.

CV: Absolutely.

HV: Um, the whole time you were talking about moving

around and stuff, you've been talking about Mountain View and I know that you've told me before how much Mountain View has changed

CV: Yes.

HV: Since you were growing up picking cotton what are some of the things that you see now that you never have believed could have come to, what was essentially the country then?

CV: Well for the first thing, I had the shock when I was driving down the road one day and I said, a stoplight? Where did that come from? So we do have stoplights and I never thought that the school would ever grow old or that the floors would rot or anything like that. And of course the old school is not there anymore. And the houses, there is so many houses that you hardly know your neighbor and almost, well maybe not quite, but almost like living in, in Hickory, in the city. And the people had, the people that had a farm or land you would not dare sell an acre to somebody. It was just, your family would take it over.

HV: When you were growing up?

CV: Yes, when I was growing up. You just would not sell a piece, that was just like selling a part of you. You just did not sell your land. And of course people have to have a place to live now and, and it's and people die and the children don't want to be responsible to have, if they are not going to farm they don't need all that land really so I guess that's one thing that they have to sell some of it.

HV: How old were you when you stopped cotton picking?

CV: About the ninth grade in school so, I picked cotton until I was about 15 years old.

HV: Your whole family or just you stopped picking?

CV: Well the oldest girl, the sister older than me got to stay home and help tend to the younger children then. And mom would stay home some. But those three that one or two younger than me, we picked cotton until we

were like fourteen or fifteen years old.

HV: What did you start doing after that?

CV: Let's see. Well we didn't uh, we didn't really farm that much after that. I mean we would help him with uh, in the afternoons, we didn't have to stay out of school and do, do farming, we would just raise our own gardens and and they would turn, like wheat, he would plant wheat and some things like that that would take up the a lot of the cotton patch, we didn't have to do that anymore.

HV: Had your parents purchased their own home?

CV: How did they? They never had a home. Or purchased a home, never purchased a home.

HV: So the house that they've had for the last several years was my grandparents' home.

CV: My grandfather got really sick and my mom was retired at that time so she went to take care of him and they all agreed that mom, mom could, she could have the house because of the years that she had tended to him or tended to both of them really and that's how she got the house.

HV: So when your parents retired, they didn't have a home of their own; where did they stay?

CV: They rented a house below where my grandparents live, they rented a home. It was all, it was a large house, they paid for their own home until they got that one so they never really owned their own home.

HV: How old were they when they retired from um,

CV: From factories?

HV: Yeah.

CV: They were both sixty-five. When they retired, they waited until they were sixty-five. At that time, they waited until they were both sixty-five.

HV: So when you were just beginning your teens and your dad had started going to Hickory to work is that when things started to change for your family?

CV: Yes. Because uh, we would uh, the bus, uh, they had a city bus and we didn't have to work, we didn't have to work in the field as much there because the, where we lived at that time, we started paying rent there. So we didn't have to uh, be home and work in the fields as much and we got to by the city bus and go all the way to Hickory by ourselves, which was lots of fun. I still like to go uptown myself and sit down and have a pimento cheese or chicken salad sandwich at the drugstore because that is how I ate, where I found and ate my first pimento cheese sandwich.

HV: Can you remember there being a difference in the things that you had and the things that you got when your dad started working in the factory?

CV: Well for one thing, he, we had insurance on the whole family, which we didn't have before. And yes, we'd go to Belk's and buy a coat, Belk's or Penny's and buy a coat. And our, our clothes were just what other people's, everybody I went to school with. And I thanked my mom not too long ago for that pretty gray wool coat. It was so warm. And my cousin lived in Lincolnton, we never were cold or anything like that, not without clothes. Dad's sister lives in Lincolnton and she had a daughter that was large, taller than my sister and I so every summer, she brought this car trunk full of clothes.

HV: When your dad started to work at

CV: When he started to work at, at the city and that's when we had more money. But in the, now when we'd done our sharecropping or the cotton, we always went together, that's right, we'd go get a coat then with that money. But as far as buying, when I was real small, as far as buying clothes, we always had clothes to wear, Mom made a lot of our clothes, but we always had a coat, even if it was like my sister wore it the year before. We still had one. But we didn't, I mean, buy, buy our own, what you call it, nice store bought clothes until my Dad started working in town.

## **Maxine Handy interviewed by Rachel "Susie" Barkley**

Maxine Handy recalls her life as a working woman in the North Carolina Piedmont.

Susie Barkley: Wednesday, November 11, and this is Maxine Handy. What's your middle name?

Maxine Handy: Davis.

SB: Davis Handy, ok and Maxine is an employee at CVCC [Catawba Valley Community College] and we're going to do an interview to find out about Maxine's history. Maxine, tell me first where you were born.

MH: Alexander County. In uh, [19]'23.

SB: What can you tell me about your early life that you remember?

MH: Well, I was raised on a farm and my dad raised apples for a living. I believe, I've heard he sold his apples, he went to Wilkesboro to buy our fall clothes and shoes once a year.

SB: Once a year? You went to Wilkesboro.

MH: Once a year, twice a year, we went in the fall and in the spring.

SB: Hmm.

MH: We had one pair of shoes for each, for like for winter and one pair for summer.

SB: Ok, do you remember going to get those shoes?

MH: Yes, I do. I remember going to Wilkesboro. We went to Wilkesboro because we lived just this side of Wilkes County line.

SB: Tell me about a trip up there.

MH: Well, we went in the pickup. Daddy drove a pickup and I was the oldest and they were six of us, I had three brothers and two sisters. And so I usually got sick

because going up and down those mountains on those side roads is so crooked and now, they've changed the roads you know, those new roads, but always got so sick coming over those. And when we got there, he would buy us, he would go get a bag of bananas so we, we'd be satisfied then (laughs). And I'd, I took care of the little ones and my mother and dad shopped around and we ate bananas (laugh) so, that was our day, it took a day, we'd go in the mornings and come back in the evenings. And I helped in the house, when mother was able, she went to the field, she'd rather be outside. But most of the time, I went to the field, but part of the time, I stayed in the house and did the cooking and she went to the field. Of course we'd have dirt roads.

That's when I first learned to drive Daddy's old pickup and one day we went up to the shop and daddy had me helping him and uh we called it the little shop that he did his sharpening of the things he used like to prune and to mow, the mowing sites we called it, and I was helping him sharpen his mowing scythe blade and I wanted to go up to my Aunt Laura, she lived just down the road and I said, Daddy, can I take the pickup, can I drive and go to see Aunt Laura? I guess so. I got in the pickup and I started out and he was standing there just looking. He stood there and looked till I got out of sight. And I come back and he said "I didn't know you could drive... I didn't want you to go up there". (laugh) So I had learned by just uh, being with the crowd, by being with the younger people in the community, I had learned on an old A model.

SB: How old were you then?

MH: I was about twelve. Twelve years old.

SB: Maxine, tell me about your schooling.

MH: Ok, I went to this little two-room school house, out in, just below where I live, Mount Olive, Mount Olive school was the name of it. And my teachers was Ms.

Sherrill and uh, Ms. Price, Mozell Price and Mrs. Sherrill. And I made two grades a year so I didn't, I was when we, I think it only went through the sixth or seventh grade, I believe it was the sixth grade. And then I had to go down here to the county school in Taylorsville, Alexander County school to take a test so I started down there in the seventh or eighth grade. That's when we only had eleven grades.

So I finished high school at sixteen. Well, I wasn't hardly, I was sixteen, well, yeah, I was sixteen when I finished high school. And uh, I, I envied the students, well, the ones that went to school when I did in the little country school because they brought their lunch, they had little lunch boxes and uh, it was so close there, I, uh, I went home at lunch for dinner, for lunch, and I wanted to take my lunch so bad, but uh, I'd run home and mother usually had lunch ready so I'd eat and I would run back so I could play ball. We had a team that played baseball and she'd ring the bell and we'd go and have this little outside toilets, you know? . . . So, it was really country I tell you.

SB: Hmm. well, it was.

MH: But we, we would, we had a good time. We, we would get up these programs at the end of school. And at Christmas, we'd have these plays, that live, you know each of us, we did something.

SB: Did you participate?

MH: Yeah, I participated. At Christmas, we would have the angels and she would have the costume and all and we would go to church to to put that one on, Christmas, but then the school would have these programs had a big front porch on the school. We'd have this live music, string music, to come and for entertainment, but we'd always have a good program, a good play. It was a lot of fun. That's the days I remember the most.

SB: What, what did your daddy think about education? Did he push you?

MH: Well, he, he sure, I sure had to go to school whether I wanted to or not, that was a known fact that we

didn't none of us try to stay out of school because we knew we was supposed to go and we went. So he would help me, he was good in history, he loved history and he would always help me in my homework.

SB: How about your mom, how did she help you?

MH: She didn't, she didn't never help me, my dad's the one that always helped me, mother didn't, I don't think she went to school very much, I don't know, never did hear anything about it, about going to school. Well, she went to Elementary school I guess, but I don't know how far.

SB: Enough to write her name, could she write her name?

MH: Yeah.

SB: Could she write her name?

MH: Yeah, she could write, she wrote me letters after I left home, to go to work.

SB: What was your first job?

MH: Housekeeping in Kannapolis. (laugh)

SB: How did you get down there?

MH: You know, that was the thing going back then, when I finished school. I was sixteen and everybody in Kannapolis was looking for housekeepers. So I went to this guy, Mr. Parks, Mr. and Mrs. Parks in Kannapolis, they both worked in the mills down there, Kannapolis Mills. Some of my, um, kin people on my Mother's side, lived down there. And uh, I think they were the ones that told them about me and I could get a ride there with one of my neighbors that worked in Kannapolis. And I could uh, I could get a ride with them part of the time, I did ride the train a couple times.

SB: The "Junebug"?

MH: Hmm, yeah, I rode the train from oh, part of the



way, from Mooresville up here. After I uh, that's when I finished, I stayed down there, uh, two years I guess I did that and then I got a job in Mooresville Cotton Mill. And I stayed with my Aunt. My mother's sister lived in Mooresville. So got to work in the cloth mill, wrapping cloth, just wrapping it in thick paper, just for shipment. I did that about two years and got married.

SB: So how did you meet your husband?

MH: Well, I was over at my first cousin's, it was one Sunday, and we all, we had church on Sunday night. And I was, I went home with my first cousin from church Sunday morning, so Sunday night, we were going back to church and her boyfriend came, my first cousin's boyfriend came to see her, well, the next week... one of her cousin's friends told me that the guy wanted a date with me, so of course that caused a lot of hard feelings... that's the way I met him, he came to see my first cousin and that's where I met him and next week or two, he was coming to see me. And that's who I married.

SB: And, that's who you had your children, your children with.

MH: And that's Ray Chapman. That's my, my children's, Chapmans, Ray Chapman.

SB: Hmm, and what did he do for a living?

MH: Well, he was working in Kannapolis in the Mill. And he quit and uh, he was a mechanic, self-employed after we got married.

SB: Was he working in a cotton mill or a cloth mill or what kind of mill was it?

MH: You know, cotton mill, I guess. Kannapolis? Isn't that the cotton mill? The cotton mill, that big mill?

SB: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, they make all of the sheets and towels.

MH: What is the name of that mill? So, I got married and I had three children. Two boys, well, I really had four,

the first one was stillborn and I had another girl and then two boys, I had two girls and two boys, three of them are living and self-employed and here I am, and old woman, working at CVCC (laughs). Oh well, I, oh yes, it's been a lifesaver for me, I enjoy being here, but I did work at Schneider Mills ... when they [her children] were growing up, I worked at Schneider Mills and when I left Schneider Mills, then I went to Wilkes County and worked over there at uh, the hospital, Wilkes Hospital, Wilkes General now.

SB: What's your first remembrance from church? Because I know church is a part of your life.

MH: Yes, we was raised to go every Sunday, my dad was a deacon.

SB: What church?

MH: Mount Olive. Mount Olive church. Dad was the deacon, mother sang in the choir and she taught us how to sing, she's told me lots of times that she'd hold me on her knees and sing to me and I'd I would get the tune, just from listening to her. I love to sing. And I've enjoyed that, in fact, we've had uh, a family quartet.

SB: Hmmm.

MH: And we sang some on Wilkesboro radio.

SB: Oh, ok, how old were you back then?

MH: Fifties, late fifties.

SB: Did you make any tapes or anything?

MH: Yes, we've got uh, we've got tapes now. Uh, they used to play them up here in Taylorsville.

SB: And that's who? What's the name of the group?

MH: Uh, the Davis Quartet.

SB: Ok.

MH: My brother Kenneth and his wife and my two sisters and myself, we sang a quartet to start with and then Kenneth and Mildred moved away and it was the Davis Trio, we sang the Davis Trio, to all the county I guess. A lot of the churches. But I love, love to sing.

SB: And you know all the old songs?

MH: Me and you will just have to sing sometime.

SB: Yeah we will, (laughter) wait til I get over this cold (laughter).

**The African-American  
Experience  
in the Catawba Valley**



## **Regina Snead interviewed by Leah Bryant**

Regina Snead is a native North Carolinian, African American woman, teacher, and community activist. She is a woman of much wisdom, acquired through years of struggling for human rights.

Leah Bryant: Today is March 26, 1999 and I am conducting an interview with Regina Snead. Briefly tell me about yourself.

Regina Snead: I'm a 55-year-old African American. I'm an educator by trade, an advocate for children in my heart, especially children with behavior problems. I'm a preacher's kid, a teacher's kid and happen to love what I do.

LB: Ok, what are the five most important character traits that you would use to describe yourself?

RS: That's a hard question (laughs) um, I'm aggressive, rather than, I mean assertive rather than aggressive, um, I am caring, I'm loving, I'm consistent, and self-assured.

LB: Great. Which one of those five do you think are most important? Or is there one?

RS: I don't know that there is one. Perhaps if I had to rank them, I might be say, assertiveness and self-assuredness. Um, in order to be successful, especially with what I do, you must be assertive and I must be assured, I mean I must be sure of myself, I must be self-assured in order to, to um, positively do my job.

LB: Would you say that your gender is extremely important to you and if so, why or why not?

RS: It's extremely important only because still today in this country there is a major difference in male/female. And so from that standpoint, yes it is important. Um, I don't look at it as important, as important as some other people would simply because I'm female. Um, people still have a tendency to believe that we are second-class citizens, that we don't function as well as men, we don't think as well as men, we can't do things as well as men and I happen to disagree.

LB: Have you seen a big change in that as time has

progressed or has it been about the same since you've entered the, maybe the working world?

RS: Big changes, you see more females in the office, in leadership roles where um, many years ago, there was just no such thing. I think we still have a long way to go, uh, most females are placed in administrative positions because the federal government says you have to have so many women in these positions and so I think we still have a long ways to go but we have come a long ways. I think in the business world, we probably still need to do um, an awful lot more because women are not paid as much as men, um, we are not, we don't have the same "rights" as men by virtually the fact that we are female.

LB: Describe your childhood and in that you may want to talk about your roles with your parents, um, the roles they play in your household, your siblings, um, religion, we know that was a factor, um, education and segregation.

RS: First, being a preacher's kid and a teacher's kid, I had to accept the fact that I had to share my parents. That was a biggie. Um, I was real jealous of other kids because my mother was giving all of this attention to them, not that we didn't get attention, but you just don't want to share.

My daddy was very seldom at home, um, and it was work related. Ministers are out in the community and he was out in the community. Ministers travel a lot and he traveled a lot. But I had loving, caring parents and there was absolutely no question about that. It's simply that we had to share. I was a middle child; I have an older brother and a younger sister. My brother and I were a little bit closer than my sister and I because my sister was the miss goody two shoes. (laughing) She never did anything wrong. The middle child, I had a lot of responsibility. Um, part of my being so self-assured now I think comes from that.

I never questioned our family. We were very close as a family and it makes a difference now. The way I do things even now. Um, being a preacher's kid, we went to church every Sunday. And that was required, it was not, my daddy never said you have to do this, it was that if you didn't go, you couldn't go out on Sunday. If you didn't feel like going to church, you couldn't go out on Sunday. Um, now it means an awful, I mean I go to church for different reasons, I believe that there is a higher power, I believe that God has a master plan for me. What I hope is that I am doing what is in that master plan. Um, so that's what I pray for. Educationally, you learn every single solitary day. The formal education that I have means nothing if I didn't continue by learning something every day.

As far as segregation is concerned, I grew up in a segregated world. I went to school uh, elementary, middle, and high school segregated schools. I graduated at Winston Salem State and it was at the time that I graduated, an all black school. I don't think that my education, the information, the loving, the care that I received, uh, in that segregated situation, hurt me at all. As a matter of fact, that time may have been better for me than time is for young African Americans now, because they don't get the same kind of caring and love that we did in the segregated situation. That's educationally, economically, it made a big difference, segregation. Um, we are still segregated in many many many ways. But um, as a young person, as a child, I grew up having to believe in myself. Every time I looked in the mirror, it was ok to be black. Otherwise, I would not be where I am now. Ok.

LB: Ok, how has the combination of these factors influenced your life? Like do you feel any resentment now or did you feel any resentment years ago?

RS: Years ago?

LB: So you probably wouldn't have been my friend years ago (laughing)?

RS: The reasons for it is High Point had a Quaker organization, and so I was a member of the organization

and as a result of it, I had this association with white females, as a matter of fact, one of the experiences I will never forget is we went to New York on the train. And at that time, it was colored and white waiting rooms and I got stuck. And there was a white waiting room and a colored waiting room and it kind of made a difference. So I don't know about that, now I still, things still happen where deep down, I know it's because I am African American, I mean, people still think I just don't say anything. And I don't, but let me share this with you. I was in Wilkesboro, Monday night, in Wal-Mart and there were some people on the other side of the aisle talking and they were talking about the black people this and the black people that and then one of them used the "N" word. Well then I happened, and I deliberately did it (laughing). I walked right around the corner, well you should have seen faces, I didn't open my mouth, I didn't need to and it just goes to show you that it's still there and people just don't have feelings. I think I probably am, I'm not quite sure that being an African American truly hurt me... I don't think that I am where I am today strictly because I'm African American. I could not do my job without the training, without the preparation and not without the ability so I don't, I think in many ways it probably helped rather than hurt.

LB: Would you feel comfortable sharing [how you feel] in situations [or] places that are predominantly white?

RS: I'm not uncomfortable and that's because I'm not uncomfortable with me. If, if I do, if I didn't have that self-assuredness, if I didn't feel good about myself, then I would be uncomfortable. But I'm never uncomfortable. So I can walk, talk, uh, stick my chest out and be proud of what I am and who I am, and so as a result of it, doesn't phase me in the least. It happens to me entirely too much. Um, I've done, facilitate[d] many workshops where I was the only one, um, I've attended classes where I was the only one. Particularly when I was at Appalachian [State University]. Um, so I don't feel uncomfortable. As a matter of fact, I've been around whites that are more uncomfortable than I am about being present.

LB: Ok. Tell me about your education and career and

we kind of touched on this, how do you think your gender and race have played a part into it. I know that um, a long time ago you told me a story about when you were teaching, maybe in?

RS: Michigan.

LB: Georgia, Michigan

RS: Yes. Well ok, I will share that story. I um, late '60's, early '70's moved to Michigan. I was teaching at Ann Visgar Elementary School, which is in River Rough, Michigan, a small community outside of Detroit. And I had set up a classroom at that time it was segregated and people would not have dreamed in Michigan that schools would have been segregated, but they were. And so I had been assigned an all black elementary school, the second grade and they had everything classroom ready and prepared for my second grade. Got a call from the superintendent's office saying they needed a first grade teacher at the all white elementary school. And I was refusing to go, they were going to charge me with insubordination and so I went. Um, probably the best school year of my teaching career was at [that school]. Um, I had raw eggs thrown on my car, I took a parent to court because the parent was refusing to send her daughter to school... We teach kids to be racist. They aren't born racist. And so, but that was a wonderful experience... I am an educator at heart and I know that. I also know that our young people can't make it without learning how to read and to write and to count. And that's in spite of behaviors. And so I invest all of my time in working with these kids who have the worlds worst behaviors and love them all. Uh, I know that my experiences as a child have added to my ability to work with these children because I went through it. From the white color war contents to not being able to use the restroom at the service station. All, everything is relative. And so all of these experiences have played [a role]... I am more patient with people, period.

LB: Do you feel comfortable talking about how you felt when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated?

RS: Oh, absolutely, I was very, very, very, very angry. I

was in Detroit then.

LB: Do you remember where you were when you heard?

RS: I was at home. We had not turned the television on yet and got a call from my lifetime friend in New York asking me if I had heard. And it was like losing a family member. One of the reasons for that and and I don't know that I was really surprised because you know, we knew, this just couldn't last. There was just absolutely no way. What I felt like, I was hoping that Dr. King had feelings enough in that short period of time that we could continue to grow. The country lost a lot because Dr. King was so smart fighting for, he was fighting for people period. So this country lost a lot and I think things would have been different had John Kennedy not been assassinated. Had Robert Kennedy not been assassinated and had Dr. King not been assassinated. I don't think our country, but it would be interesting to say, have a discussion about what we think how we think things would have been different, for us as African Americans, for the two of us as females, um, the way African American male, especially. Uh, for gay rights. How things would have been different... Because again, he was not just fighting for our rights, he was fighting for humans. I was angry for a long time, took me a long time even though I expected it, it still took me a long time to get rid of this, whoever that was that happened. And I still [observe] January 15<sup>th</sup> and that's because it was his birthday...

LB: Tell me about any demonstrations that you have participated in.

RS: Oh, fun, fun, fun. (laughing)

LB: I'm sure as a preacher's child, that you did not partake in those things.

RS: (laughing) Oh are you kidding? It was wonderful. I went to jail, daddy was like. I was in high school when the demonstrations started and so as a result of that, my war was limited to High Point. I knew personally two of the guys that went were at [Woolworth's?] in Greensboro... But I, I sat in front of a movie theatre, see,



where I was coming from, colored people sat in the back. So we had to go up five or six flights of stairs, no bathroom up there and we couldn't use the bathroom downstairs and so only the landings, if you had to use the bathroom was where you had to go to the bathroom. But we threw popcorn over the balcony and accidentally put a soda cup on the top and knocked it over, they put a police officer up there to try to keep us from doing those kinds of things. Um, but we were supposed to be picked up in front of the movie theatre, we marched and sang and um, I went to jail twice.

LB: Did you call your dad?

RS: Oh God, the first time I called my dad to tell him I was in jail, he came to get me and I would wait, he was mad because I wouldn't go anywhere. Absolutely not, we had toothbrushes and magazines and extra toilet paper, so we were prepared, chewing gum, we had some crackers, we had in bags in preparation for staying there because we knew we must. One of the worst things that happened, well two things. The very worst thing that happened to me demonstrating is I have, we were in line, marching and this white male decided that he wanted to spit on us and so he did. Well, we were taught non-violence, it's one of the most difficult things in the world how to do is to accept that this man was spitting on us and we couldn't do anything. When A & W root beer, I will never forget, we went in A & W, sat at a table, and this man, I can't stand ammonia today because of it, he took a glass, a jar of ammonia and poured it on the table. It was awful, there were about six of us. We knew nobody had a burn on their skin from the ammonia. I will not forget those experiences, I went to Washington for the march on Washington. I went to Alabama, my daddy didn't know that. There were about seven of us drove down to Alabama. And by this time, I was at Winston Salem State and so we left campus and drove to Alabama so that we could march in Alabama. My friend in New York who has pictures, she literally has pictures of us... that's history that you'll never forget. Uh, it's, it was wonderful being a part of it and I was young and foolish and didn't care. You know what I'm saying? Uh, we were just determined to make a difference and it started in black churches. Only reason why black ministers

participated so strongly is because they couldn't lose jobs. Ok, my mother could not do as much as my Daddy did because teaching school... So black ministers became our leaders because they couldn't lose jobs. Um, many, many, many minorities that lost jobs because they were part of demonstrations. Many many, but I would take nothing for the experience. It was great.

LB: If you had one piece of valuable advice to share with Generation X, what would that be?

RS: Mmmm. First it's so important to feel good about yourself. If you don't feel good about you, when you make your attempts to improve you, and that doesn't necessarily mean formal educate yourself, if you formally educated yourself, it's just that, based on what you want, what you like to do, what you would like see happen, you have to feel good about yourself. So to develop good positive attitude, good positive attitude about yourself. If you do that, you can do anything you want to but you have to first feel like you can. And understand black, white, red, blue, green, it is ok to be different. It is simply ok. I'm don't have to think like you. You know what I am saying? It's ok for you to think differently than these people around you. There's nothing wrong. You can still be friends. You have to feel good about yourself. If you like me and not feel good about you, but first believe that you can. You can. And so, my advice first is to feel good about yourself and then I guess the second most important thing, that you have to accept people for who they are, makes no difference who that is. I have experience in Detroit, I was um, leaving the school, getting on the bus, I was riding the bus then to work and every day for about five months, I saw the same group of winos on the corner. And one afternoon, getting on the bus going home, one of them spoke and I didn't say anything. And he said ma'am, it never hurts to speak. Well it hurt me to my heart that I did not say a thing. There's no excuse for it, so it makes no difference. And so after that I speak to people now, makes no difference whether they say anything to me or not, I'll say good morning... and there are people who turn around and look at me like I'm crazy. But that experience with this man, see I don't know where I was, did I feel like I was better than he was? You know what I'm saying? I don't,

but I'll never forget it and you have to accept people for who they are. Period. You may not agree with them but you do accept them for who they are. So first to be to feel good about yourself and then to accept others for who they are, regardless. I think those are the two most important things that we can do.

LB: Thank you very much.

## **Freedman Community Interviews, Lenoir NC**

What follows are several interviews of African-American residents of Freedman, a neighborhood centered around Finley Street on the east side of Lenoir, in Caldwell County. The community developed during Reconstruction as newly freed blacks—freedman—established their own homes for the first time. Popular tradition holds that they established themselves on the edge of town because they were not allowed to live within its actual boundaries. The 1880 census listed over fifty African-American households in the enclave. Most of these early residents were unskilled laborer, but there were two blacksmiths, a minister, and a grocer. In these early years, the Colored Free School was a major neighborhood educational and activity center. It later became the Odd Fellows Hall. This community continued to thrive into the twentieth century. By

the 1930s it contained a poplar Tea Room, restaurant, movie theater, and combination skating rink and dance hall. During the same decade a Freedman School opened on Harrington Street. The center of society in Freedman has always been the church.

The following oral histories suggest, however, that in recent years much of the community cohesion has broken down. Much of the property has now passed into the hands of landlords who do not take the same pride in the homes as the original owners. Likewise crime has been on the rise and many vacant lots dot this once proud community. The Freedman residents interviewed in this study make a strong plea for a return to community and family values in hopes of bringing back much of what Freedman has lost.

### **References:**

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1880 US Census, Caldwell County NC

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## Allie Hartso interviewed by Joy Powell

Allie Hartso is a lifelong resident of Freedman, a college graduate and retired school teacher. In this interview she reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of the neighborhood. She remembers many people who emerged from poverty and segregation to go on and have successful careers; yet she is also deeply troubled by many of the problems that beset the community today.

Joy Powell: Good morning, Ms. Hartso,

Allie Hartso: Good morning, Joy.

JP: I'd like to start our interview by asking you to give me some basic information about yourself. Um, including your name, date of birth, birthplace, um, spouse, children, and your educational background.

AH: Alright. I am Allie [Pettison] Hartso. I was born Allie May [Pettison]. I'm married to Wade Hartso. Uh, we're the parents of one daughter, Vanessa Hartso [Rodriguez], and we have one granddaughter, [Kallie] Antonio [Rodriguez]. I grew up in Lenoir. I was born in Lenoir. I attended the segregated school here at the time I finished high school, you only had to complete eleven years. I left high school and went to Johnson C. Smith University. Where I received an AB Degree in Elementary Education. I taught in [Waynesboro], Georgia two years before coming back to Lenoir to work. At that time, jobs were very hard to find in Lenoir and I couldn't find one here or in the surrounding areas. So a friend of mine called me one Friday afternoon when I was at work, and asked my mother to have me to return the call and I returned the call and she wanted to know if I had found a job, and I told her no. She said, well, would you like to have one and I said yes. So she gave me the name of the principal and his telephone number and asked me to call him. Now this was about seven o'clock on Friday. I called him and, uh, he said if I would accept the job, someone would meet me at the bus station, and they did and they would have somewhere for me to live. And I lived in a house very close to the school. I worked there two years before returning to Lenoir to work. I enjoyed it.

JP: Okay.

AH: I was with three of my college schoolmates and that made a difference. When I came to Lenoir, I started

working at Freedman Elementary School. I worked there until [pause] 1962 when they opened up a new wing for middle school students at Freedman High School and I moved down there. I worked there from '62 until '89.

JP: Okay.

AH: Um, during the time I was there, well, let me back up just a little bit. During the time I was working at Freedman Elementary School, I completed my Masters of Science in Education at A&T State University. When schools were desegregated, Freedman School was changed to Lenoir Junior High and then, after Lenoir Junior High, they decided they would change the name to Lenoir Middle School, which it is today. I enjoyed working with the teachers there, of course, one will always find some that are hard to get along with.

JP: Mmmm.

AH: but that was all right. The thing that bothered me most, I would go in in the mornings, whoever I would see, I would say 'Good Morning.' And the thing that would bother me most was they would say what was good about it. [laugh] So I would, in turn say, 'Well, you're living.'

JP: Yeah, that's true.

AH: And that, that's a good answer.

JP: [laughing] Yes it is.

AH: You're living.

JP: Okay...I've been told different stories, but about the Freedman community, do you know why it is called the Freedman Community?



AH: No, ah, it's a question I've never thought about. I've never questioned that name. All my life, it's been called Freedman.

JP: Okay, okay. And um, how did, how did you go, come to live in the Freedman Community?

AH: Oh, I was born here.

JP: Okay.

AH: Well, to show you how things change, when, uh, I was born and grew up in the Freedman Community, the street we lived on was called Patterson Street, because blacks and whites did not live on the same street. But since that time, that street has been changed to Stonewall, because Stonewall goes straight down.

JP: Okay, and can you give me an overall description of the community? You say that blacks and whites didn't live on the same streets, were there whites in the communities within the boundaries of the community?

AH: Uh, boundaries, I would say yes. Because I could leave my house, our house was right on the corner and now, which is Stonewall and [Brooks]. We could go a few houses down [Wilson] and there were whites. You'd go a few houses down Stonewall which was at one time, Patterson. And they were whites. But we got along together, we played together, but going to church together was a no no. Going to school together was a no no.

JP: Okay. And um, let me ask you this, as far as you mentioned school, um, what types of education systems were in place in the community.

AH: Well, when Freedman school was first built, it was a four-room school with an auditorium. My brother and sister, older brother and sister, oldest brother and sister, finished the eighth grade. They couldn't go to high school, so Daddy had a Ford, a two door Ford, backseat, and they went to Hickory.

JP: Mmmm, so it was sort of a self-made?

AH: That's right.

JP: Transportation system or busing system?

AH: They had to do it on their own. Daddy had to buy the gas, my brother drove the car. And they went to school at Ridgeview High in Hickory. And some finished the eighth grade went to, um, the school in Wilkesboro, I forgot what they called that old school in Wilkesboro.

JP: Mmmm. And that's about a thirty-minute drive?

AH: Oh yeah or more, more or more than thirty minutes, it's thirty minutes now.

JP: Uh huh.

AH: They just got a room and stayed there.

JP: Okay.

AH: And then a few went on to Morganton and lived with relatives and went to school there.

JP: Do you know about what year that was?

AH: Mmm, they finished high school in 1938, so this had to be the beginning of um, no, they finished high school in '34, so this had to be about '30 or '31 or somewhere in there.

JP: Okay.

AH: So they went the first year at Ridgeview and everything was fine. When they started their second year, they wouldn't let them enroll, told them to go back and let Caldwell County take care [of their children] so they wasn't any big deal about it and our daddy and some of the other men in the community just went to some of the people in Lenoir and told them what had happened in Hickory and that they needed a school.

JP: Mmmm.

AH: So they just got one started.

JP: Okay.

AH: How they did it, I don't know. But it's unusual, now in that first class, I think there were about seven or eight people. But out of that group, four college graduates, ended up being college grads.

JP: So in a sense, you can say that your father was one of the pioneers of the high school in the Freedman Community?

AH: Oh yeah, because he had two children that were going to Ridgeview.

JP: And um, what was the name of the high school that was in the community?

AH: Uh. Well, they just called it Freedman High.

JP: There wasn't?

AH: They had the elementary school already, though, and they just called it Freedman High. School.

JP: Okay. And was it considered a part of the Caldwell County School System?

AH: No, it was the city of Lenoir.

JP: City of Lenoir?

AH: City of Lenoir. Always had two school systems in Lenoir during that time.

JP: Okay, let's switch gears here and I want to ask you about businesses, were there any, um, just black businesses within the community?

AH: Yes, um, Reverend Tom Patterson had a little store next to his house, you know where he's up there, where uh, Chester Ferguson used to live?

JP: Okay.

AH: That was his house.

JP: Okay

AH: And he had a little store right uh, I would say to the left of his house. Going up there, it would be to the left. And then there was East [Finley] Tea Room.

JP: Okay.

AH: And then Ms. Steve Propst had a store over there near uh, the Jones fellow that lives up there, what's his name?

JP: Uh, Leroy [unintelligible]

AH: Leroy. Alright, Leroy Jones' home used to be owned by Steve Propst.

JP: Okay.

AH: And he had a café right beside it, going up toward the cemetery. And then, right there at the cemetery before you get to Steve Propst's store, there was what they used to call a Odd Fellows hall.

JP: Mmmm.

AH: And that's where the Masons would have their meetings and I don't know what the Odd Fellows, I never did learn much about them.

JP: Okay.

AH: And Annie May Jones, that's her maiden name, had a beauty shop in there. And \_\_\_\_\_ Jones had a barber shop on the other side. And then in later years there was a pool room.

JP: And just, just in my imagination, most of these uh, business were right along Finley Avenue.

AH: That's right along Finley.

JP: Mmmm. And that cuts directly through the community.

AH: That's right, that's right. And then in later years, someone built, the Horton family built the cinderblock building that used to be at the corner of Finley and Patterson. And, uh, there was a grocery store on one side and Inez Horton ran the restaurant in one section and Tom Scott had a barber shop on the end. And right below that, going to the church, there was a service station. And they would sell gasoline as well as repair cars.

JP: Boy.

AH: At that time, as far as I know, there were only three churches in the community, St. Paul, Smith and Moore, and it's called People's Tabernacle now, but when I was growing up, they just called it the Tabernacle.

JP: Okay, well you got ahead of me, that was one of my questions I was going to ask you as far as [laugh] um, what churches were in the community. Okay.

AH: And there was another store on Finley. It was right across the street from Sam Everhart ran a grocery store, of course he was um, white and so was Bill Walls, but Sam Everhart ran the grocery store when I was a little girl and we could take two pennies and buy a penny's worth of sugar and a penny's worth of Kool-Aid because they had little penny packs of Kool-Aid and you could make a quart of Kool-Aid.

JP: Well goodness. That's [laugh] Wish we could do that today.

AH: (overlapping) During that time, you could buy loose sugar, you could buy loose sugar.

JP: Um, ok, well, you have pretty much gone over some of the things, but I wanted to go back and ask you about um, about the social life and talk about um, some Tea Rooms and things like that, what other types of things did happen or went on in the community.

AH: Well now, as far as I remember, the Tea Room was open just on weekends, it was run by Ms. Katherine Jones and her husband. And East Finley was open every day.

And East Finley was where they had the jukebox and had a section where you'd go in there and play the jukebox and dance. But you know I, my husband talks about going to East Finley and dancing but I never had a chance to. My mother just didn't go along with that type thing and social life for me was going to school and going back home and going to church.

JP: (laugh) Well ok, ok, well let me ask you this question, I heard in my days growing up, you know within the community, about the Knotty Pine Grill. Is that, can you tell me about that?

AH: Well, I used to work at the Knotty Pine Grill. Ms. Katherine and her husband did the cooking, they had one little room where you could just come in the door and sit and order your food. Then they had another little room in the back where you could have a small group. But as far, and over upstairs of the Knotty Pine Grille, they had an apartment, so someone could rent that apartment. Let's go back to the store, that Bill Walls ran and now Ms. Hartley had a cafeteria. They had two apartments upstairs in that cinder block building.

JP: Okay.

AH: I'm sure you remember that cinder block building before it was torn down.

JP: Mmmm, I do. (laugh)

AH: They had two apartments up there.

JP: Okay.

AH: And Mister Bob [unintelligible] ran a store at the corner of Patterson and Finley Avenue too, but I don't ever remember going in his store. I know, Ms. Mamie Patterson and Mr. Miles Patterson had a store on Finley next door to their house and we would go in there and buy sodas, ice cream, candy, things of that type. Uncle Seymour Patterson had a little store at his house and we'd go buy candy, chewing gum, sodas, things of that type. And they didn't try to oversell their items. They were close to the same price they were uptown. And that

made a difference, so now you go to these little fast food places, I mean, these little convenience stores and the price is outrageous.

JP: Mmmm, that's true.

AH: I went uh, Christmas Eve after the grocery stores had closed and one gallon of milk and one half gallon of orange juice came to five dollars and something. So that shows how those prices are a lot more than they are otherwise.

JP: So, just listening to some of the things you tell me, really you didn't have to go outside the community to, to get much.

AH: Well, you would go outside the community for your major shopping. You know, just like your week's groceries, you'd go somewhere else to get those, but just small things, no, and walking, oh my goodness, people feel as if, now, they feel as if they have to ride to church! People walked to church. and the thing that amazed most, by going to St. Paul's the people from West End would walk all the way to Freedman for Sunday school, eleven o'clock service, then they would walk back for the service at night. Now they have care, you can even pay them to go.

JP: Mmmm. That's true.

AH: And they would also come for choir practice. I think they had choir practice they same night they had prayer meeting. But they would walk. Rain, didn't bother them, now they might not come quite as much when it was snowing, but uh, otherwise, they were right there.

JP: Okay, um, I um, did some of my studies, I found that there was a library also in the community?

AH: Oh yes, that library was in the same building where I had mentioned to you was used to be a pool room.

JP: Mmmm.

AH: Right there where [unintelligible] has his little store

now. And uh, that library was run by Ms. Mills. Or was she Mel? Hart, maybe she was Hart.

JP: Okay.

AH: Hart, she was a sister to uh, [pause] uh, [pause] Ms. Mary's sister was a Patterson, Mr. Patterson, his wife was Ms. Mills' sister, Ms. Mill was a Hart. I'm getting Mills mixed up because of Mills we know, they are all interrelated there. (laugh)

JP: And Ms. Mills the name is familiar to me because, didn't she run a daycare?

AH: She did, she started the first daycare the day care is the same building that's up there on uh, Finley Avenue where, there's a fence around it, nobody goes in there or anything.

JP: So the building is still standing?

AH: Oh, the building is still there. The building is still there.

JP: Okay, I think I went to that daycare, that's why I know, I believe I did.

AH: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Well, you know, people were interested in doing things more so than they are today. At least, I have that feeling. They were anxious to get things done, they wanted to see progress. And I thought it was nice that we had a rest home, for senior citizens in Freedman, and the regular rest home. They stayed in business a long time. [pause]

JP: Okay. Um, as far as um, I guess what I want to ask you to do is make a comparison for me of the community of yesterday to the community of today.

AH: Oh my goodness.

JP: And some changes, in the community.

AH: Oh my goodness, oh my goodness, today Freedman looks like, to me, it looks terrible. When I was growing



up, Freedman looked like a big hometown community.

JP: Mmmm.

AH: People took pride in their homes. Now, nope. Some do and some don't. Well, one thing about it now, we have so many vacant lots. All the lots that are vacant now had homes on them. And they took a lot of pride in them. Uh, let's take the property where Smith used to be. It's vacant land now. The house next to where the church was, it's vacant. The house between your aunt Inez and [unintelligible] the land, there was a big house on the property. Uh, there were houses back behind where Sylvia Greene's daughter lives, the Davenport's live there, then right beside that was Finley Avenue, East Finley and right beside that, Ms. Mary Sill had a home. And going up Stonewall, there uh, two vacant lots, used to have homes on them, our house used to be there, now it's torn down, uh, the Branch house used to be up the street there, now that's torn down. Uh, Ms. Uh, [intelligible] she used to have a house right beside of uh [unintelligible]. Vacant property. We have so many vacant lots now.

JP: Mm, that's true.

AH: They used to be a house right there on the corner of Finley and Sharon. It's torn down, a vacant lot. The reservoir used to be in Freedman, I don't know whether there is a reservoir there or not, just a big tank.

JP: I think it's just a tank. They's one out at my grandmother's

AH: Well you see, alright, well you see, that, that's how things have changed. Alright, on the corner, some years later, uh, what they call the corner now, uh, Mr. [unintelligible] he had uh, a little restaurant there, I guess you could call it. And of course, uh, [unintelligible] had his store there. And right below John Jones, used to be another service station, and a lady lived in that house for a long time. Those apartments that used to be up and down Rankin Street, them too.

JP: And why do you, why do you think that is?

AH: Well, the people aren't building up. Now right across the street from where we used to live, there's a green house there now. That used to be our playground. Daddy and the other men in the community stretched lights all around that area and they used an extension cord and plug them in at the house or anybody's house and we'd go over there and play late in the evenings or at night. They would pitch horseshoes, play baseball, uh, the boys played a little football, played croquet, things like that. They saw that it was leveled off nicely, there was plenty of sand there so nobody would get hurt. You know, you don't find people today wanting to reach out and help young people enjoy themselves. In um, decent ways, I didn't use the word decent, though. You know, they uh, might have some kind of little jam party or something, but that's not always the best way. Let them participate in physical activities and enjoy themselves. That's the way I see it.

JP: Um, I guess ending [laugh]

AH: I'm one of those homebodies, I have always been a homebody.

JP: Okay, well you, you've got a lot of experience [laughter] and know a lot about the community itself. I've um, been listening to some other people talking about the high school having a band and a parade.

AH: Oh yeah.

JP: Things like that.

AH: Well you see, uh, it started off as a four-room school with outside privies in the back. And then, when they had to start the high school, they added four more rooms and they put a cafeteria in the basement, after the build the gymnasium and then they started the band. But before that, uh, Home Ec[onomics] was in the basement to the left side, near the cemetery of old Freedman school. I, I remember having to go to the outside privies out there. But we still enjoyed it, we were just a big happy family. And maybe I'm wrong, but today, it seems if people don't care as much as they need to care. You know, we would have PTA meetings, our parents would



come out. Any kind of program at school parents were there.

JP: Mmmm.

AH: but now, I, the way I view it, parents attend PTA and anything at school if the band is involved or they have to go to school because of some disciplinary action with their child.

JP: Okay, [laugh] that's about right

AH: It makes a difference now, it makes a difference, you know, what used to be you don't think you had to tell a child, 'I'm going to tell your mother.' And that child would calm down. You'd see the mother on the street, uh, to call her on the telephone and that was the end of it. The parents would take care of problems. But now, it's not like that.

JP: It's funny that you mention that because I was just thinking along the lines of, I hear a lot of black parents say, back in my day, if I got in trouble, just walking through the community, I knew that that parent over there might spank me and then I'd get home and I'd get a spanking. Did you experience anything like that in the community?

AH: Oh yes, oh yes (overlapping). I remember Ms. Nancy Love lived in that house next to where we used to live, it's a rock house now. And uh, my mother would go to town, she didn't have to worry about that, us, because Uncle Seymore was on one side, Ms Nancy was on the other side, and Ms. Nancy would walk outside with a mouth full of snuff and say, I'm gonna tell your mammy, and believe me, she would tell your mammy and your mammy didn't ask you if you did what Ms. Nancy said, that was the end of it, no questions asked. Ms. Novell was right across in front of us over that way. Where the trailer is now. And uh, they just took care of each other, it was just a big happy family. The community was just a big happy family.

JP: That's

AH: That's the way I would think of it.

JP: Mmhmm, well how

AH: (overlapping) everybody helped, tried to help

JP: I guess my final question would be what would you attribute, um, the downfall, or not say downfall but the changing of the community to?

AH: I, I, don't have a good answer to that, I really don't because, I know well, let's put it this way. The streets are narrow, and people wouldn't want to build on a street where two cars couldn't pass, couldn't pass easily without some parking on the street and I would think that would have something to do with it and um, be where people keep their property in nice condition, at least I would think so. Freedman is just an old community, there are some very good houses, now, don't get me wrong, there's some very good houses in Freedman. And there's some that landowners just don't take care of. Some of it's rental property and they just don't care and let's let's take Finley, or East Finley where Ms. Mary Steele used to live. There's no need for that property to be grown up in weeds and trees like it is, but it is. You have to keep a community in [pause] um, I don't know what I want to say. I know what I want to say, but I don't know how I need to say it. A community needs to be well kept for someone to want to move in there. Now look at all that property there. Uh, the Patterson family owned on Finley. The house, the big house was torn down, the store was torn down and now nothing is in between there. And it, it makes a difference. You want to live where you feel comfortable and it looks nice. Now, up and down Finley, but now when you get onto some of the side streets of Freedman, it looks a lot better, I would think. I'm thinking mainly, I'm thinking mostly of Stonewall and uh, Finley. Go up Harrington Street and it looks good, or um, Circle looks good. Uh, somehow it just doesn't look good in Freed- on Finley, but they don't look as good as they did when I was growing up. Number one, they are old houses, because I'm old and if I was a little girl when those houses were built, before I was even born, you could imagine how old they'd have to be. I, I-that's just one person's opinion than mine.

AH: And they, and they could do it. Did you ever know what was on the property of where Freedman school is now?

JP: No.

AH: It used to be the city dump.

JP: Really? In the central location of the community?

AH: Well, that they really build William Lenoir- well, we call it William Lenoir Middle School, but it used to be Freedman, where they built that school, it was the city dump, and right over from it lived the um, the [unintelligible]. They had a big farm over in that section and uh, where Broyhill is now, used to be, um, the dairy, the dairy cattle all in that field there, so, you know.

JP: So, ok, I remember you saying a cemetery, so the school was build basically between a city dump and a cemetery, is that kind of, is that right?

AH: School (overlapping)

JP: It's built on that?

[Mrs. Hartso tells a story about how blacks are buried on the margins of the cemetery]

AH: Blacks are as a there's a road that you go up and come back down and blacks are on that side next to the black community. Yes.

JP: That's, that's the side that's on like the uh, Folk Street side of the side of the hill.

AH: That's right, that's right. That's the only place blacks could bury. And why segregate people after death? Now that's always been a question on my mind.

JP: And you think that was because it was like the boundary of the Freedman community?

AH: I guess so, I don't know.

JP: Possibly.

AH: I don't know, but it might be.

JP: Now that's strange.

AH: Now we can't even find my sister's grave over there.

JP: Mmmm.

AH: No, but that's just the way it was. But things, you know, even though I attended a segregated school, I still feel that I got a good education. And I still feel that I from the time I was in the classroom, I was as good, if not better than all of my coworkers.

JP: I don't agree. (laughter)

AH: I had my heart in it. I wasn't there for that dollar, I was there to see what I could do to help somebody. And during the time I was in the classroom, I didn't care whether they were black or white, all of us had to learn the same thing. We have to. We had to be able to pass those competency tests and the only way to pass them was to work. (laughter)

JP: Ok. Well that's some good information. (laughter)

AH: I know, I know, I know they gave me, I know they gave me a rough name when I was there, but that's all right, that's all right. They teased me about that green dress I used to wear when I taught fourth grade, that's, I wish I had kept that dress. (laughter) So many people talked about it in different class reunions, I wish I had kept that green dress. (laughter)

JP: Ok. But I thank you for the interview.

AH: All right, is there anything else I can

JP: Well if there's anything you can think of that maybe I didn't cover in my questions? Or

AH: Oh, let's see. Now we didn't talk too much about the corner, because I just mentioned that Mister [Forney]

built that corner. And he built apartments up and down the side, now we didn't say anything about putting it, it was bricked up and it became a sore eye for the city of Lenoir. One thing that, I would only go up there on the corner uh, to distribute poppies on poppy day. And it's funny how some of those, my former students would say, they would curse somebody else that was cursing them. They'd say don't you see Ms. Hartso coming by here, shut your mouth. They, they, they'd respect me enough to not want somebody else to curse even though they were cursing them, the others were not cursing (laughter). But uh, you know, I and the thing that makes me feel good, as many students as finished Freedman High School, a lot of them did well in their chosen professions, a lot of them are not in Lenoir now, not because they don't want to be here, but because they couldn't find a job. You know, when you start thinking of the Ph.D's that have come out of Caldwell County, it's a lot to be proud of.

JP: mmmm, it is.

AH: I was at a reunion last week and this young lady had gone back to school and she has her Ph.D in nursing. And there were doctors, lawyers, uh, ministers, educators, uh, we have to go and talk about jail birds, but this community survived and we're surviving. Even though I'm here on Hospital Avenue, I think of myself as part of the Freedman Community. Uh, maybe the city hasn't extended it, but I have extended it from up there all the way back down here. (laughter)

JP: So I can, I can safely say you are proud of the Freedman Community.

AH: Well I am, I am, I am, for what it has done for so many people over the years.

JP: Ok, well I thank you so much for the interview.

AH: Alright, I don't know whether it's doing as much now as it did in the past, but some years ago, it was a nice community. And everybody enjoyed it and we were happy. I don't think anybody would say they don't want to come back home, they might not want to come back

here to live, but come back to visit, fine.

JP: Ok, well thank you, I will end on that note.

## **Ida Mae Patterson interviewed by Lester Whittington**

Ida Mae Patterson recalls over eight decades of her life as an African-American woman in the North Carolina Piedmont. She has lived in Freedman in Caldwell County since 1935. Her memories tell us much about the changes in that community over the years.

Lester Whittington: And your children and your education. Ok, go ahead.

Ida Mae Patterson: My name is Ida Mae Patterson, uh, my birthdate is 10-9, no, that's right. 11-10-14. What else was it?

LW: Your birthplace.

IP: Kings Creek, North Carolina.

LW: Talk about your children, spouse and your children or your husband and your children.

IP: Mmmm. My husband was I had nine children, um, all of them went to Freedman High School except the last four. They attended Lenoir High School.

LW: Ok, your education

IP: Except Joey, he finished at Patterson School.

LW: Ok, your education.

IP: I graduated from Lincoln Heights in uh, Wilkesboro, North Carolina in 1934.

LW: Ok, your occupational experience, what do you do?

IP: I was a um, label inspector for eight years at Rosepatch, which is Paxar now and the other years, I worked as a maid.

LW: Ok, thank you. Uh, how long did you, how did you come to live in Freedman community or how long have you lived in the Freedman community?

IP: I have lived in Freedman community since [19]'35.

LW: Which would be 64 years.

IP: Mmmm.

LW: Can you give me a description of the Freedman community when you was coming up?

IP: Mmmm. At that time, we had no streets or sidewalk. The roads were just mud when it would rain and you had to pick your places to walk to keep from getting hard up in the mud and we walked to town, very few people had cars at that time. We would walk to town, get your groceries or whatever, and lug them back in your arms unless you had the money to buy a cab.

LW: Was there any stores in the Freedman community?

IP: Yeah, we had stores.

LW: Could you tell me a few of them?

IP: Um, East Finley, that was a little store.

LW: Uh, Mr. Robert, uh?

IP: No, [there was a] black man that runned it out here on the corner.

LW: Aw, uh.

IP: That built houses.

LW: Mr. Irving?

IP: Hmmm.

LW: I don't know (laughing) Well we can come back to you, come back to that.

IP: Uhhh, what is his name? You know he built houses... I can't think of his name...

LW: What type businesses were in the Freedman Community at that time?

IP: Well we had [a] Barbershop

LW: Do you know who ran that Barbershop?

IP: Jones.

LW: Jones.

IP: Mmmm. We had a library, you could go get books and we had nurseries there that we could carry our children while we worked and knew that they would be taken care of.

LW: Mmm, mmm, ok what was the social life like back then as far as like clubs or everything?

IP: Oh it was good, it was good. Um, everything was quiet and peaceful, you didn't hear drugs and shooting and killing and carrying on like that. People could go and leave the doors unlocked and come back and everything would be the same.

LW: What was the name of that club again?

IP: Called it the Two-spot.

LW: Ok, can you give me uh, the name of the church that you attend and how long you attended that church?

IP: Saint Paul AME Church since '35. I joined it right after I married.

LW: And who, who was the Pastor back then?

IP: Reverend Stroud.

LW: Reverend Stroud, ok.

IP: [unintelligible]

LW: Ok. And can you give me like a brief description of Freedman back then as far as today, ... just a description

of the community. Because I know they had like the, the band coming through Freedman.

IP: Mmmm. They band would play and they would just play on the grounds at the school, they had no gym for them to play ball, they'd just play on the grounds play basketball and uh, mmm (laughing), um, things have changed up so much since then, we, on Sundays, we would go to church and come home and have dinner and in the afternoon, people would go visit each other, we had no TV's to watch. People would go visit, we'd walk to West End and visit, walk from West End to church and they would walk over here to church and um,

LW: It's not like, like a few years later you had like little rivalries between West End, Freedman. Back then everybody got along.

IP: Got along good.

LW: In the community like West End, Freedman, Harpertown,

IP: Mmmm. Mmmm.

LW: Do you have anything else to add to this interview as far as uh, uh, the community as a whole or how you, where you think or what would you like to see change?

IP: Mmmm. Uh back then people got along together, people weren't jealous of each other like they are now. Nowadays, everybody is trying to outdo the other person and don't have interests in other people. In, in those days, parents looked after other people's children just like they would theirs and take care of them and and now you can't say nothing to that child or let alone hit it, you'd be put in jail for that. So I think in those days, people just loved each other more than they do today.

LW: Ok, thank you Miss Ida Mae.



## **C. Inita Smith interviewed by Shakeita Hackett**

C. Inita Smith recalls growing up in Freedman during the 1950s and 1960s and how the community has changed over the past half century.

Shakeita Hackett: Could you please state your name?

C. Inita Smith: C. Inita Smith.

SH: And your date of birth?

CS: May 11, 1951.

SH: And where were you born?

CS: Caldwell Memorial Hospital in Caldwell County.

SH: Do you have a spouse?

CS: Yes. Chester Ferguson Jr.

SH: And do you have any children?

CS: I have four children by Chester Ferguson. And I have a daughter, Shakeita by James Hackett.

SH: Um, how far did you go with your education?

CS: At first, I went to the tenth grade and quit school after I got married and had four children. In 1981, I went back to school and graduated at Hibriten High School in 1984. I went to school with the twelfth and eleventh graders during that time. And I enjoyed it very much.

SH: What is your occupational experience presently?

CS: I am a nursing assistant one and I take care of—home health—, elderly people.

SH: Ok, um, do you know why the community is called Freedman?

CS: Yes, it is called Freedman because of the old slaves that um, migrated there and that's the reason they called it freedman because they were freed from slavery.

SH: Um, how did you come to live in the Freedman community?

CS: My mother, my grandmother was born in Catawba County and she married Andrew Cable Care from Collettsville and we moved to Freedman when I was a little girl around about five.

SH: Um, can you give me an overall description of the Freedman Community at the present time?

CS: Yes um, we were all family, we all, if one ate, everyone in the community ate. Everybody worked together, everybody raised each other's children we played together, we had any, no problems, not a lot of violence and crime. I'm not gonna say we didn't have any violence but I'm gonna say that it's not like it is today.

SH: What type of education system used to be in the Freedman Community or other surrounding?

CS: We had Freedman Elementary School, Freedman High School, West End Elementary and Dulatown Elementary. District Number Nine is what it was called.

SH: Ok, how would you compare the educational system now to the educational system then?

CS: Right now I think that our black kids get their education but not as... they should. Because during that time, [the 1950s and 1960s] the black teachers took time and one on one and taught our kids and everyone enjoyed school. Now with the black kids now, we have to stay on them and keep them um, prepared and focus on the education instead of a black and white thing. Um, I think our kids really need more black teachers in the system so they have a uh, person that they can look up to and feel that they can go talk to them, not as a black person, not as a white person, but as a person that understands them and know how it was when they were,

when they were brought up in the Freedman Community.

SH: What type of businesses were in the community?

CS: We had Mr. Robert Felder's store, um, the day cares and...the only other thing was the library. We didn't have any uh, um, black businesses as far as places where they sold sandwiches and stuff like that.

SH: What was the social life like in the Freedman Community?

CS: We had a place called the Blue Haven. And Ms. Geneva Hudson run that and it was a place for us to go after school and we danced and we had hamburgers and sodas and communicated among each other and we just had a good time.

SH: Did you have like any nightclubs where you would go like on the weekends?

CS: Well, that was Ms. Geneva's. She had a little club downstairs, she cooked hamburgers and hot dogs and things upstairs but downstairs she had a jukebox where we put our quarters in and played music and danced to um, James Brown, Temptations and Miracles and all of that.

SH: Did y'all have like pool tables and things like video games and things like kids have now?

CS: No, but we did have a pool hall where kids would go in, but you had to be 18 to go in and shoot pool.

SH: So they didn't have like video games and stuff like that?

CS: No, we didn't. We played at home and in the cemetery and different things like that after school, after we did our homework and threw our wood and coal in.

SH: Can you tell me about the library and the daycare and the Freedman Community?

CS: Yes, we had um, daycare ran by Ms. Mayo Harten and Ms. Biv Patterson, they were the two older ladies that were in our community. Um, we first started out, um, up

on the hill uh, across from the laundry in Freedman and then we moved down to um, Finley Avenue where Ms. Mayo lived in this big green house she had a daycare right beside of it. Then we had the library that was on Finley Avenue run by Ms. Jones.

SH: Could you elaborate more about the library?

CS: Yes, we had um, bookmobile, Ms. (Lavette?) would get into the bookmobile and ride from community to community for people who couldn't come to the library and check out books. She had all history about the black people, um, she had pictures hanging up which now are in the bottom of the Saint Paul AME Church. Um, it was just uh, a place where we went to look up different things about our community and about black history and we got to check out books and uh, come back and bring them back. Um, I remember one day, I kept a book out for ten days and I had to pay something like fifteen cents, it was like a penny for every day it was checked out overdue.

SH: Um, could you tell me what, the churches that were located in the community?

CS: Yes, we had Smith Memorial Methodist Church, which was on Rankin Street, we had Saint Paul AME church where it is now, um, uh, Smith Memorial moved to Sharon Avenue, it was an old, old church and so they uh, they destroyed it and built a new church. Uh, then we had the People's Tabernacle ran by Ms. Sister Austin. Everybody loved to go down there and we had uh, Ms. Jean Whittington and uh, Ms. Jones, I forget her first name but they'd teach us bible verses and we would win stuff and we had Christmas parties and the cemetery is right behind that and we'd always go down there and uh, Halloween and scare each other.

SH: Would you say the churches have changed since the time you have, since the time you've grown up until now?

CS: In a little, I think so a little bit because, it was, it was more family oriented then, when uh, anyone would get sick or anyone didn't have anything, everybody would work together for them to have it. We do that now but not as much as so as we did back then.

SH: Um, was the other churches like in the West End community and the other communities around the Freedman Community pretty much the same or do you know?

CS: Yes, um, especially Dulatown. A lot of those people uh, work together in the community, you know, stuck together. If one built a home, the other would build a home. It was more like a family thing in Dulatown and in West End.

SH: Um, y'all have black history celebrations like we do now.

CS: No, during that time, the black people didn't have, was not recognized for the things they did and it was just like every, every ordinary day, we went to school, we were, we went, we went to school way more than you all do now.

SH: Ok, would you make a comparison of the present and past Freedman community?

CS: Well, when I was born up, it was a very well likeable place. Everyone loved Freedman. We played, we walked the streets, we could leave our doors and things open and now people can't do that because of the drugs and, and the people stealing and not honest with each other. And I think we got away from, uh, the kids being brought up like I was brought up, I mind to everyone's parents, not only my own. If I got a whooping at school, I got a whooping at home. If I got a whooping at someone else's house, I got a whooping at home. So we knew to mind and we were brought up to respect people. If you whoop someone's children now, they call it child abuse. It's not, they need to be brought up to respect elderly people. So I think we have got away from the tradition of, of respect and the way we were brought up in the church and how, we went, we went to Sunday school, we enjoyed going to Sunday school. We had all kinds of programs. Our kids worked in the church. If one went, everyone went. We didn't go anywhere unless we went to church. If we wanted to go to the Blue Haven, we had to go to church on Sunday morning and Sunday night. We sung in the choir. We did youth things. We just had a good time. Ms. Uh, Dula from West End was our Girl Scout leader.

She had us going places and doing things in the community. And we all respected that. So I think now, what our problem is, is that our kids are getting away with things that we didn't get away with and are not being raised like they should have been raised.

SH: Would you say that drugs are a bad thing in the Freedman Community?

CS: Not really because drugs are everywhere. I think that it's a little more useful, a um, it's bad, but I think you can get it freely now. When we were growing up, there probably was drugs but they were just not like that is today in our community. But I don't think it's that bad because they have really tried to clean it up but Freedman is not the only place drugs are. There's drugs downtown. So if they going to clean up one area, they should clean up all the areas.

SH: How do you feel about the people tearing down the pool hall and all that that used to be right there in front of Ms. Tilley's house?

CS: I think that it was a shame because that was a historical place. What they needed to do was renovate it, make it a better place for the kids to go and have something to do. It's wrong for anyone to sell liquor or do things that's illegal. I'm sure that back in the days when they were growing up or when I was growing up, they sold liquor, but that didn't make it wrong for them to tear down our building. I think it should have stayed like that and I don't think they should have changed our Freedman school to William Lenoir, it should have been called Freedman Elementary School because it was in the black community. So we let them take our school name, we let them tear our buildings down because we did not stand up for what our community stands for.

SH: I would like to thank you for letting doing, do this interview and say you did a job well done. Thanks. That is the end of my oral history report of the Freedman Community done by Constance Inita Smith.

## **Annie C. Davenport interviewed by Lester Whittington**

Annie C. Davenport is an African-American woman who was born in rural Caldwell County in 1925. In the 1940s she moved to Freedman to attend the then all-black Freedman High School, graduating in 1944. She has resided in Freedman for the last fifty-four years. Her memories shed considerable light on how the community has evolved over time.

Lester Whittington: Ok, it is January 1999, state your name please.

Annie Davenport: Annie C. Davenport.

LW: Date of birth?

AD: August 1, 1925.

LW: Birthplace?

AD: Caldwell County

LW: Spouse?

AD: Thomas Clyde Davenport.

LW: Children?

AD: Uh, you want me to name how many I have or?

LW: Just how many you have would be good.

AD: I had four children, one died as a baby at six years old. I've got three grown children, four grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

LW: Education?

AD: I just finished high school at Freedman High in 1944.

LW: Occupational experience?

AD: Just domestic work.

LW: Ok, how did you come to live in the Freedman community?

AD: I came up to go to school, didn't have any in

Caldwell County. We lived out in the county, we didn't have high school, just to the ninth grade and I moved from the ninth and went to Freedman High.

LW: How long have you lived in the Freedman Community?

AD: Ooh, about 54 years.

LW: Can you give me an overall description of the Freedman Community back then?

AD: Well Freedman had more than we have now, we had tea rooms, cafés, stores, but we don't have anything now ... I don't think Mr. Roberts open too much.

LW: Ok, what type education system was in the, in the community then?

AD: We had grammar school on up, they had high school just when I was going, they just finished up to the eleventh grade and they put the twelfth grade on after the year that I, the next year they put the twelfth grade up. So I just finished in the eleventh grade.

LW: Ok, what was the social life like back then as far as like clubs and what did y'all do to enjoy yourselves back then?

AD: We walked streets, stopped at the ... tea room, what was Ms. Katherine's down?

LW: The Blue Haven?

AD: Ms. Katherine Jones, you know, I don't know, anyhow... Then we'd walk, stay there for a while then we'd go down to the tea room, Ms. Steele's tea room, then sometimes we'd go to Steve Propst, he had a, one across the street, near the barbershop up there.



DW: Ok, can you tell me about the library and the daycare and who ran those facilities?

AD: Uh, Ms. —um, [here Ms. Davenport cannot remember the woman's name]. She ran the uh, library and Ms. Mel Hart ran the Daycare center.

DW: Ok, what type churches were in the community then?

AD: We have the same that we did have, we got AME and ... it's the holiness church, I can't think of the name right now.

DW: Uh, what church do you attend?

AD: Saint Paul AME.

DW: Uh, can you give me a brief comparison of the Freedman Community in the past as of today, how it was back then and how it is today as far as uh, you know, everything has changed and...

AD: Well Freedman is just Freedman now. Uh, we don't have the places to go to, people really don't have nowhere to go but church. You don't even have a tea room to go sit and I forgot about Ms. Pearl having a tea room, café and but they really don't, they nowhere for people to go and you know sit and socialize now. But we don't even own a tea room or café in Freedman. And no store, don't even have a store in Freedman now.

DW: I can remember growing up Mr. Carl Harlton had uh, filling station, uh, Mr. Uh, uh, Bill had his store, Ms. Mamie had a store.

AD: Yes. Yes.

DW: It seemed like there was more.

AD: Yeah there was more, ain't nothing here now. Nothing, you can't even buy uh, a box of salt if you run out of salt you've got to go all the way to town to get it.

DW: Is it anything else you'd like to add to this interview as far as your own personal opinion about the commu-

nity and how things are?

AD: Well it's, we have more people in Freedman now because we have, we tore the school down and built apartments. And we have more people, you know, younger people that lives in Freedman than back then but we just, there's nothing to do, nothing. We do have, well, we have the Martin Luther King Center, which is a big help but it just can't accommodate everything. You know, we really and truly, somebody needs to build a nice place so that you know, so you can at least go out and socialize some. It's not church is nice, but you just need something else besides church.

DW: I've just got one question to ask you, uh, it seems like so, our young kids today do not know the history of our community when they tear down, they do not like to replace nothing. Shouldn't they be something in our community to say like this where the old school used to be, this where this used, like a statue or monument, they like, it's like they stripping us from our history of our community. You think they should have something to put back as they take away from our community?

AD: They should have and the young, they should have and they should be something for them to know what all have been here in Freedman. So it'd be nice if somebody would write a book about Freedman so that the young ones could see what the old people went through and then I'm sure, if it was different before I come. So it'd be nice if the young, you, sit and tell them now and they can't believe it, Freedman used to be like it was. But we, we really had a lot here in Freedman for a while. Because we did, like I always like to say we had the library, we had the daycare center, we had the churches, we had all these tea rooms and I mean that, some of them was, now I ain't going to say that all of them was real nice to go to. But I know two, we had two nice places to go. That was Ms. Katherine Jones [and] Ms. Mary Stevenson.

DW: I also remember, I don't remember but I just remember seeing pictures when y'all had like Freedman had their homecoming, the band used to walk.



AD: Oh lord yeah.

LW: Can you uh tell everybody about that?

AD: Yeah, we had a good band. At Freedman, when Freedman High was going we had a good band. Mr. Davenport was on the ball. And that, whoo, that Perkins boy, he was the

LW: Drum major.

AD: Uh, what do you call it? Uh yeah.

LW: Drum major

AD: Yeah, yeah. He could go but we had a good band (laughing). They can't say that Freedman didn't have a good band because we did.

LW: Ok, thank you Ms. Annie.

**Native Americans and  
other racially mixed people  
in the Catawba Valley**

## **Dorothy "Whitehawk" Brookshire interviewed by Mark Ressigie**

Dorothy "Whitehawk" Brookshire is a Native American and member of the Shawnee Nation. She also has Lumbee and Catawba ancestry. She reflects on what it means to be a Native American in North Carolina today.

Mark : Let me go ahead and introduce myself. This is Mark Ressigie and I'm going to be talking with Mrs. Dorothy Brookshire. It is January 22, 1999.

DB: Ok, do you have any specific questions you want to start with?

MR: Well, how about a little bit of history about yourself?

DB: Ok. Well I was born 1949 here in Caldwell County. And over the years of growing up, and my mother as I look back on it now, raised us very much the Indian way; however, she didn't call it that. And we thought everybody learned survival skills and this type of things of the woods, you know. Uh, so at that point you know, I had no idea of the heritage and as time went along, and I moved away from here when I was 18 and moved down to Georgia and I would take trips to the beach and things like that and of course in the summertime I get very dark in the sun. And at that time too, I had longer hair than I do now and I parted it in the center. Anyway a lot of people would ask me, are you Indian, and of course my answer would no. And they would say well you must be French then with your bone structure. And I would say no. And they would say well what is your heritage and I would say I don't know.

MR: You didn't have a guess back then?

DB: Right, I mean the only thing I knew for certain is that my dad told a story about his grandmother coming here from Ireland when she was a little girl, which later on I found that story not to fact. It was part of the process of hiding the heritage. Anyway, I moved back here after, I guess ten years. And when you are, when your roots run deep around here, they run really deep, a lot of people leave this area but they seem to come back, most of them. But anyway over the years and dad died in '64 and so mom was my whole world as far as a parent.

MR: About how old were you then?

DB: I was 15...and five years prior to, mom had had a major stroke, at the age of 33. So when I came back, and of course, she had done wonderfully, her name was Lunita, which means little moon. And I learned that, but you know, [it] still didn't click in my head. And it just goes to show you how well, you know, programming a child can, can do.

MR: Exactly. And what I was wondering was back then, in your history books and when you were in school, did you learn anything about the Native American Indians?

DB: Nothing...Nothing other than like the Lost Colony.

MR: The Lost Colony?

[Mrs. Brookshire is speaking of the English settlement at Roanoke Island in the 1580s that mysteriously disappeared. It is often referred to as the Lost Colony]

DB: Yeah that was about the extent of it back then. And as time went along, though, and mom's health declined even more, she finally crossed over in '94. And after that, I started thinking, you know, I had been walking the Red Path for several years and didn't really understand why. And when I say I was walking the Red Path, I had been led to live my life the spiritual way of a Native American. And so after she passed away, I realized I didn't know anything about her, her family other than her brothers and sisters and her parents. And I had heard the name, her great grandmother but, you know actually I didn't know anything past that so I thought, you know, it would be interesting, you know, to just take a look back and see. So I went and started searching through the Census records for North Carolina. And naturally, I started looking in the county that she grew up in and it was Columbus County. And her maiden name was Woodell. And I could not find any other Woodells in that

county... another Woodell was there for a short period but that was it and I thought well these people had to come from somewhere.

MR: Right.

DB: So I started checking the surrounding counties and when I got into Robeson County, which is the home of the Lumbee Indian[s], all these surnames just started falling out. It was as if I unzipped the bag with all my relatives in it. And of course, some of them were listed in the census as Indian and some were listed as white. And so that was my real beginning point... But when I got the heritage, well I shouldn't say heritage at the point, when I got the ancestry chart done and I wanted to make sure, you know I wanted to confirm this, I didn't want this to be a mistake. So I went to Robeson County and I spent a week down there and I went to the library, of course, to get local records and to the courthouse and then to tribal enrollment office in Pembroke. And when I took the ancestral chart in and the lady took a look at it and she said oh yes, these are all our people. And these are all full Lumbee people and she said you are half Lumbee. And she proceeded to tell me that [Bullard] was one of the surnames and she said your [Bullard] women came from an area called Black Ankle and not knowing a lot about it, I said well, are they the same tribe? And she said oh yes, definitely.

But what had happened back during the civil war, Indians were stripped of any rights and especially in North Carolina. They weren't allowed to bear arms to hunt, the children couldn't go to school, it was just really hard times. So the Eastern Indians, by having a lighter complexion, a lot of them, not looking like the stereotype of Geronimo, you might say, if you had lighter colored skin, you could pass for white if you lived in certain areas. So what happened, the local government said if you live in Robeson County, you are either Indian, black, white, or mulatto. However, they said if you live in Columbus County, you are either white or black because no Indians live there. But it was and is the home of the Waccamaw, Sioux and plenty of Lumbee people live there. But by it being that way, if you were lighter skin, you could move right across the county line and you didn't have to say you were white because the govern-

ment said you were white and that way they were able to give their children an education and you know, they got the freedoms of the white people... it really must have been pretty tough on the census takers, you know, to have to stand there and make that decision, make that call and there was some strange census taking back then. Of course, the Lumbee people were originally called the Croatoans and of course they went through a period of time when that's what they were through the census. Then there was a period of time when they were called the Cherokee of Robeson County... I can't remember the year but there are census records where they were marked as the Croatoan, excuse me, the Cherokee of Robeson County and then it went back and they rubber-stamped it Croatoan. And as years went along, they were called by several different names so finally they decided you know, call us Lumbee because we live on the Lumbee River. And now you will notice white people talk about that river, they call it the Lumber River. But the Lumbee have always called it the Lumbee River, so they are the Lumbee people because they live along that river.

MR: That's what I was going to ask is how the name came about. Because it sounded, in reading over some of the material, it sounded like that name was arbitrarily pulled out but they made some reference to the Lumber River... It did have some factual basis back then that those Indians called themselves the Lumbees.

DB: Uh, they were the Croatoans. Um, and you will find a division that some say they came from the shore.

Anyway, they do feel that their blood goes back to the Lost Colony and for the Lumbee there is no such thing as a Lost Colony, the people were never lost. And there are a lot of written facts to substantiate that. Why it's never been taken as a real happening thing, you know, it's a fact that these papers, these writings, these logs, you know there's copies of them and there's nothing in them to suggest that these people were ever lost but because of that, you know they went inland with [Chief] Manteo's people and there was 89 men, seventeen women and eleven children and Indian people living in villages, the 89 men naturally sort of threw the scale over the one direction to the European side and still today, there are

Lumbee Indians who carry the last name of the people originally on the log of the ship...from the Lumbee people, though and their white ancestors, see about two hundred years after John White's group, there were explorers that came through and recorded that they had found a very unusual strange group of Indian people who had light skin, light hair, some of them had blue eyes. And then they were living in European style houses, which would have been Log Cabins back then and wearing European style clothing. Speaking to them in Old English. And two hundred years later which now makes four hundred year this past fall, another group came through and reported pretty much the same thing except now they were speaking four hundred-year old English...Well now some of it too, see, the black heritage works into a lot of the Lumbee people. So and that's why today you will find in the Lumbee people people who are light-skinned, light eyes, all the way to black and in then some in between. Now my mother had skin about my color and she had blue-black hair when she was young and hazel eyes. And so I have the hazel eyes and I have always had black hair but I've never had blue-black. But my nephew has blue-black coarser hair.

MR: That's interesting but you are right, it is the mixing of all the genes over the last now 600 years.

DB: Well now I think we talked about once before, during one of the smallpox epidemics, there were Indian tribes that were almost wiped out from small pox because they had absolutely no antibodies against it. However, the Lumbee people lost fewer to small pox than any other tribe. And they contributed [attributed] that to their European ancestors who had the antibodies. So that leaves it up to the individual, you know, what do you think? The Lumbee assimilated so well, because they basically already were living like Europeans, you know, the bonnets and calico dresses, you know, they were farmers anyway so they just sort of blended in other than skin color, you know, because in the beginning you have to understand, the Indian people of North Carolina had plenty of freedoms in the early days. And the government did not want the Lumbees' land or the Waccamaw or those people because it was considered, worthless.

MR: It was a swamp area?

DB: Right.

MR: It was all swampy and they kind of considered it kind of cheating the red man, they said well the Indians want it, go ahead sell it to them, there's no value to it anyway...

[After some discussion of the infamous Trail of Tears, Brookshire then begins to speak of her Shawnee heritage].

DB: Ok now I don't, belong to the Lumbee nation. Now my mother was full-blood Lumbee but now my dad was Shawnee, Catawba, and some English and you can only belong to one Indian nation when you are mixed blood. So I chose to belong to the Shawnee. So I am Shawnee...as far as blood quantum, I have more Lumbee blood than the others, but oddly enough, when I started making my discoveries, remember I told you I had been walking the Red Path for several years.

MR: Before realizing it.

DB: Well oddly enough, everything I had been doing was the Shawnee way. So the lesser amount of blood spoke the loudest...the Shawnee and the Catawba all play a role or did play a role in North Carolina, and that's something that a lot of people don't realize is that well, let me back up, when you say North Carolina, with Indians, most people think Cherokee and that's because the Cherokee learned to uh, they learned commerce and the tourist trade which helped them greatly...the Cherokee make up a good size part of the Indian population in North Carolina, but there's over 80,000 registered Indian people in North Carolina and 48,000 I think it is live in Robeson county. North Carolina has more Indian people living in it, the last figures I saw, they had more than any other state east of the Mississippi...Now and where you are sitting here are old homelands. Uh, the Catawba lived here, four miles as the crow flies over here is a mountain called Barrett's Mountain. Jonathan Barrett was the first white man on this side of the river and [an] old Chief of the Catawba people was the one who greeted



him on this mountain here... [my grandfather told me] that Jonathan Barrett married Chief Adler 's daughter, I mean excuse me, his sister, Jarfly Jarmin and... the people really liked him and that's why the mountain is still, it's Barrett's mountain in his memory. But, from them came a lot of the Catawba line and now that's another interesting thing too, that there was no such thing as the Catawba nation or the Catawba people before the settlers came. Uh, they were just all kind of different bands of Indians that lived up and down the Catawba River so the settlers clumped them together and called them Catawba, which is just people of the river and they lived from the head waters in Buncombe County all the way to Rock Hill in South Carolina... a woman in Taylorsville, she uh retired from the courthouse where she worked and I can't remember her age but she's fairly old now. But she told me that uh, there's a place... called White Creek, where all these people lived, the old people... her dad and he was kind of a historian for the area and she uh, very nice lady, we were talking on the phone and she says honey I remember when your people down in there were called the white Indians....

[Brookshire then discusses some of her nineteenth-century ancestors and recounts the story of how many Catawba Indians were killed by a smallpox epidemic. The survivors left the area and paddled down the Catawba River to a place then called Rock Fort, South Carolina, now known as Rock Hill. Then she proceeds to discuss her recent ancestors and Native American customs she remembers from childhood.]

DB: ...my great grandmother died in 1900, she, her husband, and three of the six children from typhoid, they died within days of each other which meant my grandmother then was raised by an aunt and uncle. And when my mother was little, and this is a story that was passed down to all of us, uh, my grandmother and granddaddy, once a month, approximately, uh, a man would come and you know cars had come into existence then but not, you didn't see them often, but would come in a car and pick them up on a Sunday morning. And grandma would not wear anything that she had made then, she wore store-bought clothes, her hat, gloves, you know, Sunday go to meeting type things, granddaddy wore suits and

they would leave with this man and the children were never allowed to go with them and they would be gone all day and return at nightfall, no one ever knew where they went and at the same time, uh, grandma's uncle Nicholas, who was a brother to that woman was doing the same thing. A man would come once a month and he would pick him up and he would wear his finest suit and not even his wife was allowed to go with him and he would go somewhere in the same vicinity is all we know and would not come back until after dark. And my grandparents were considered uh, well off people for farmers.

MR: Did they have any other rituals that your mother introduced to you back then? Any other rituals that you remember growing up?

DB: She had her little signs that she was taught that she used. Of course she planted by signs and things like that.

MR: Are we talking about religion?

DB: And in the springtime... she would tell us when we saw the first bumblebee to come tell her and then we could take our shoes off and go barefoot. And when we saw that first bumblebee, we'd break our necks getting to her and you know it never occurred to us to lie to her.... my brother, she taught him how to trap birds.

MR: Really?

DB: Right and a stick and a string and she would do this in the wintertime and so he would do a good job with it, she would tell him that every bird that he captured, she would cook it for him. And that's what he had for his supper that night... Now by the time I came along, of course they were still picking tobacco with the horse, I mean the mule and the sleds but uh, they were raising a lot of tobacco, soybeans, and peanuts. That was the main crop and uh my granddaddy died when I was about two and grandma continued and they had what they called uh, tenant house, you know where people lived in it and worked there and they brought in people from the outside... but she [grandma] farmed as long as she was able, she was 80 something years old when she died... Now with me and our Shawnee customs, uh, to us and

this you know, you have to give and take, but to us, if you go to another nations pow wow to dance, to us it's respectful to take our shoes off to dance on their land so as not to bring our land and mix with it because that would be disrespectful so you have to give up a custom here and there.

MR: I never thought, I never thought of that but you are right. Cultural differences among the tribes.

DB: Uh huh. Because they are not all the same just like um, when I was growing up, my mother cooked like she was taught, which was totally different uh, she was taught to pick anything from the garden when it was still very young, up here, most people want it to grow and get very big first. She liked to use yellow corn meal, up here they've never heard of it, you know, they only had white corn meal. Uh, so she couldn't get it back then except when we went to grandpa's....

And they, they ate rice three times a day, rice was, you had rice with everything, um, and I guess that too is from the swampy areas back in the old days, they probably grew rice, I don't know that but it would make sense...rice and fish. Now my mother though, would not eat seafood, uh, she would eat perch and spots and croakers, that's the only fish she would eat. Uh she didn't care for any of the other stuff, she wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole, she just didn't like it.

But uh, now daddy on the other hand would eat anything...when I was little, we'd always have a hog usually every year and he would raise it and this is some of the things that he picked up from momma's people, he would uh, kill the hog when it got to the size they called a shoal. Now his daddy though would want them to get completely grown but the one thing he did do that was very Shawnee that I discovered later, was he salt, salt packed his meat instead of smoke curing it, he salt packed. Which I later found out that the Shawnee used a lot of salt packing for their meat, that's how they preserve it...when I first started learning to cook and things, uh, my daddy would get so upset with me because I couldn't peel a potato without making the peel thick and he would say look at all the food you are wasting. You know, so they were very and I guess a lot of people were uh, I

don't think that was an Indian thing so much as these people lived through a depression...Well and see though when you go back to mom's people, there's another thing, during the depression, they had plenty to eat and she would actually trade her ham biscuits for peanut butter biscuits or something in school because the meat was plentiful with them. And I don't know how grandpa did that but they had hogs, goats, uh, of course the horses and mules and cows and chickens, um, and my grandmother must have been one of the most gentle people in the world, her animals just loved her to death and I can remember as a child if her hogs got out, the first place they headed for was the house, trying to get in to her...even when I was small and grandma would cook, she would cook the leftovers in the top of the stove because it was a wood stove and uh, she would put the leftovers up there and that could sit there all day and you'd take a bite as you went through or whatever. It did not spoil. Today you could do that and you'd get food poisoning. The reason being is the food then, the animals were not pumped full of chemicals, growth hormones and things like that. The meat was more pure so it didn't degrade as quick.

[The interview concludes with Brookshire's reflections on her heritage.]

DB: ...I do have that Lumbee blood...And mixed blood means you have more than one Indian blood.

MR: It is considerably more complex than I, than I ever imagined.

DB: There's probably in the neighborhood, I believe it was 120 registered Indian people in Caldwell County on the last census. So that will go up slightly in the new census and I'm interested to see how much it goes up, you know because I think people are finally to the point that they are no longer afraid nor ashamed of their Indian heritage...but you have to keep in mind, you know, that and that makes it more interesting too, that all Indian nations have different ways of doing things, different beliefs, some no longer have chiefs, they have organizations that rule them and they may have an elder counsel. Uh, the Navaho no longer have chiefs, they have

governors, they call them. Uh, and there are some Indian people who think we're nuts because we continue to live the old spiritual ways. You know, uh, we are still governed by a chief and a counsel and our counsel, it's an honor to be on it but there's no money and some now you are paid if you are on counsel, but ours is the old way and the tools that you use uh, the main tools you use especially for a medicine person, uh, we feel need to be made by you... There's a lot that will stay among the people that is never passed on to others. Or we pass a lot of knowledge to people but there are some things that we hold dear to our hearts that we never really speak of outside of our own people.

MR: ...I thank you very much, thank you very much for the opportunity here to talk about this.

DB: ...And uh, I'll end it with uh, (says something in Indian language) and (says something in Indian language), which means blessings and may we always do good.



**The Gay and Lesbian  
Experience  
in the Catawba Valley**



## **Thomas Fancher and Edwin Farthing interviewed by Lucy H. Allen**

Thomas Fancher and Edwin Farthing were gay partners who shared a home together in Hickory. Edwin is an attorney and Thomas a realtor. Their interview sheds much light on what it means to be gay in a middle-sized southern town. Since the time of this interview, they are no longer partners, but have remained friends.

Lucy Allen: I'm at the house of Thomas Fancher and Edwin Farthing and this is an interview for the Building Community from Diversity Project in their home in Hickory.

LA: Ok well, Thomas we'll start with you. Just give me your name, where you were born, and what do you do.

Thomas Fancher: Ok, I was born in St. Petersburg, Florida, and moved to Dallas, Texas when I was so little so I really consider myself a Texan.

LA: Okay.

TF: I'm a realtor with Remax here in Hickory.

LA: When were you born?

TF: March 10, 1965.

LA: And how long have you been in Hickory?

TF: Since February 9 of 95.

LA: And you?

Edwin Farthing: Ed Farthing, born in Greensboro, July of '47.

LA: Ok.

EF: I came to Hickory in August of '72 and I'm an attorney.

LA: Tell me a little bit about the community you live in here in Hickory.

EF: You mean the gay community or the neighborhood?

LA: Tell me first about the neighborhood.

EF: Ah,

LA: How would you characterize this neighborhood as a community?

EF: Yes, this neighborhood is uh, developing a sense of community but it's laid out very much as a community.

LA: Ok.

EF: It has sidewalks, most of the houses have sit in front porches, in other words, you can sit on the front porch...they are built close to the street so that if people are walking by on the sidewalk, it's not a shout from the porch to the sidewalk.

LA: And do you know most of your neighbors?

EF: Uh yeah. Within several houses and again, the neighborhood association is just a couple years old and those that have become active in it, now know people two and three blocks away.

LA: What are the characteristics of this neighborhood then, of this community that, that's a neighborhood association. I mean, what's the diversity within the neighborhood?

EF: It's a very diverse neighborhood, which is one of the reasons we were attracted over here.

LA: Ok.

EF: I actually owned the house before I met Thomas. But what attracted to me to the neighborhood was what I just said, the fact that it was laid out as a neighborhood.

LA: Hmm.

EF: The fact that it is hmm, both ethnically, culturally, age diversified. We have grandparents and we have people that are having children.

LA: Hmmm.

EF: In the neighborhood. Um, it's a typical rejuvenating neighborhood in the sense that about ten years ago, a lot of the people over here, probably the majority of the people in this neighborhood were older or had died and families owned the house and rented it out. And the neighborhood has definitely [been] down at the bottom of the cycle and five, ten years ago, people that were younger began moving into the neighborhood and it's now going through a classic urban renewal. And one of the classic elements of an urban renewal is that the gay population is very strong in this neighborhood. We seem to be more adventurous than others in going into a neighborhood and renovating a house and bringing it back up to current standards rather than twenty, thirty, forty year ago standards.

LA: Hmm.

EF: Within a stone's throw of this house, uh, there are several gay couples and several lesbian couples.

LA: Hmmm.

EF: So again, we can look out our front door and wave to family.

LA: Mmm. Now that's a, that's a fairly common term within the gay community to refer to other.

EF: Family?

LA: Yeah.

EF: Yeah. And a lot of that comes from the fact that when some people come out, they lose their biological family. But they're, they have a family that they are accepted into and that's the gay community.

LA: That's, that's wonderful. Talk a little bit more about the, the gay community within this area, not necessarily this neighborhood but how did, how did you become involved with that.

TF: Well, you know, probably several years ago, there probably wasn't a lot going on in this area, Ed started a men's group, what, six years ago?

EF: Be close.

TF: About six years ago and I think that really started to get other gay men at that time in the four counties together once a month and, and started discussing things and having speakers and stuff like this in once a month. Then a few years ago another group started up, which was men and women and that group grew extremely fast and is still growing. They do all kinds of community, things together and travel together and diverse speakers and educational things and within that group we brought a play into the Newton performance center, the theatre two years ago?

EF: Yeah.

TF: Which was supposed to be, well, it was pretty, it was very controversial, it was hmm, about a young man coming out and and things of that nature and it was sort of a musical, that Johnny Coffee and Rodney McAlester had written and a lot of people didn't really expect a big turnout but there was about three hundred and something people, it was a packed out auditorium that night, not just gay people, straight people and parents and everything. So I mean, since I think a couple years ago that the gay community has really come together and, and started working together towards common goals.

LA: How do you think some of the challenges that the gay community faces in terms of discrimination have things in common or are different from some of the struggles that the Hispanics who are moving into this area for example, or other ethnic groups who are discriminated against in various ways?

EF: I don't know that there is a direct answer.

LA: Okay.

EF: The gay community if you are talking about gay men is different than the gay community if you are talking about lesbians.

LA: Okay, and

EF: There is no such thing as quote, the gay community, just like there is no such thing as the black community or the old people, the gay community, speaking of both male and female one is everywhere, it's in the Hispanic community, it's in the black community, it's in the older community, it's in the younger people.

TF: It's in the religious community.

EF: Correct, I mean, it's literally, we are everywhere. So there is again, no such thing as a monolithic gay community. Within the gay community, we have every single prejudice that exists in every other community. We have white gay men who do not like um, black gay men because of the racial difference. Or we have older gay men who do not like younger gay men whether they be black or white because of the generational difference. And I have told people frequently that if the gay community can overcome the stereotypes within our own community, then we can show the rest of the population how to overcome those stereotypes and the discrimination that exists because of those stereotypes. I think a difference, though, in the gay community is that those of us who realize that that discrimination exists within the community the gay community can step back and say, how can we fault the larger community for holding the stereotypes against us that we hold against ourselves. Now that doesn't mean we don't keep fighting to break those stereotypes but it's done differently than a black person might do it. Another difference I see is that each of us grew up in the nongay community because we grew up as part of the larger community. So by being raised, we were raised with the same stereotypes that everybody else has or that a lot of people have about the gay community. We worked through those to get to the other side so when somebody is speaking to me about discrimination and why they feel the way they do,

whether it be on religious grounds or social grounds or whatever, I know exactly where that person has come from because I've been there.

LA: Hmm.

EF: But I had a reason to work through it. And my family, and both of our families, had a reason to work through those stereotypes because one; we had to deal with ourself or, two; a parent or a brother or a sister was dealing with somebody they loved whereas somebody who was speaking theoretically may not have the same motivation to make it all the way through each of those prejudices or each of those stereotypes. We also, most of us, even though we were born gay from the minute that we perceived ourselves, we did not perceive ourselves as gay or lesbian, we perceived ourselves as persons. Whereas, I was born and knew early on in my life that I was male, so someone else who is dealing with prejudice and stereotype has dealt with it as a black person for example since day one. A gay man or a lesbian may not have started dealing with the stereotypes until they were a teenager or even a young adult, twenty, twenty-five, thirty years of age. That's a whole different point in your life to start dealing with prejudice. As opposed to having dealt with it from day one. So you approach it from a different perspective. I approach it from when I came out as a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant male. Southern, in the South, in full possession of all of my civil rights and be damned to anybody who touched one of them. And I think that's a completely different attitude than a black male might have because he may not perceive himself in full possession of his civil rights ever. And so I always protected what I had, somebody else is striving for something they want. And again, that's a different perspective.

LA: Yeah, that's, that's interesting. I want to go back to the notion of family and sort of individualize this rather than talking about community at large. Uh, what sorts of family traditions did you grow up with and how have, ok, let's take, a good example I think is Thanksgiving that most families have a certain way of celebrating Thanksgiving. Maybe start with that and then how you may have adapted this as your family traditions change, which of

course, they always do in, in any kind of relationship. What kinds of family gatherings did you have growing up that were special to you and what sorts of things do you have now that, that you have been retained but maybe modified or continues on? Real special, like Fourth of July or Thanksgiving or Christmas, celebrated in a certain way.

TF: Probably Christmas and Thanksgiving were the only special occasions or holidays that we had in my house period. My family was constantly spread out and going from the time I was a young child until even now, my parents traveled an awful lot and so those were basically really the only two times a year that we really had a special occasion, it was those holidays. As far as carrying them on now, I mean.

LA: What made them special when you were growing up? What were some of the specific things that you remember doing?

TF: Well, spending time with my mom and dad, I mean I didn't see them a whole lot growing up. On those two days, or even a couple of days before those two holidays, um, the whole family would usually be together and we'd spend time cooking if that was what needed to be done. My father liked to watch football so that was always going on and so even now, on holidays, I'm not a football fan but I'll turn the football game on to, you know, to hear the noise of it as I'm walking around the house or something. I really think the only reason we all came together as a family at, you know on those two occasions basically was because of the day. In my family, the sense of unity or, maybe that's not a good word, togetherness or the need to be together is not as strong as like with other families. We all love each other very much and I wouldn't say that we are distant, but I think because of the way that we were brought up with my parents really pushing independence because they were gone so much that we really did all get to be extremely independent. I've been away from Dallas, Texas, now since probably '87 or '88, and I have spent maybe only one or two holidays back at home since that time. You know, I talk to my parents on the phone often but, I think the independence factor has always been pushed so much in my family that

we've all, we've all pretty much gone off and done our own thing.

LA: How about in your family?

EF: We just celebrate birthdays, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, all holidays. My grandparents on my mother's side came for Christmas. Having had two adult lives, one married, and then not, that made that transition very easy. From the very beginning, I have not gone back home for Christmas, reminding my parents that they did not go to their parents. For the very same reason, when you have a child, it's not worth it to load all that up to go. Now that all of my brothers and sisters, um, two brothers and a sister are away from the house, it's a very special occasion when we can all four and parents (because both of my parents are still alive), when all six of us can get together with spouses and children and that kind of thing. I can't remember the last time because it has been so long that all four brothers and sisters, all spouses and all grandchildren were in the same place at the same time. That's probably been five or six, seven years ago. Um, there was no change and again it may be because of when I came out in here I was in my life and that kind of thing as far as Thomas is concerned, being accepted into the family unit. And that's because when I came out I made it very clear to my mother and father that there was no one in my life at that point. But if and when there was, that person would be treated exactly like my wife had been treated because when that person came into my life, that person would be as special to me as my wife was.

LA: Hmmm.

EF: You know, the people who don't understand that and somebody reading this transcript who has never dealt with a gay person or a lesbian person might not figure out what I'm trying to say from that but the specifics were that my mother and daddy accepted that. Now they had to wrestle with the coming out process, because that's not who I was as far as they were concerned. They did not have to go through the same wrestle that other parents have to go through when they realized they are not going to be grandparents and that there would not be



a traditional wedding and that because I had done that. So that was not taken away from my parents. But they still had to adjust completely their view of who I was as opposed to who they thought I was, which was also, I'm sure different than who they expected me to be. So they had to still wrestle with that. But they understood that they did that on my terms or they risked a breach of the relationship and there was a breach for several months and it began to heal, but again, they had a lot of adjusting to do. Again, I think this may be a good opportunity to get down on the record that when a child comes out of the closet, frequently the parents are put in a closet that they did not particularly choose nor want to be in.

LA: Hmm.

EF: And again, you have to go through so many concepts. There's the concept of coming out. You don't come out once, every gay person, every lesbian person that I know makes decisions every day on whether to come out. To an individual or to a group or to whatever the situation is. That's again different that a Hispanic person or a black person because when they walk in a room, they are black or they are Hispanic. Um, you ask about this community and in this area. There is a gathering place, there is a gay club in Hickory that caters to both men and women. It has been interesting over the last couple of years to watch the immigrant community as they come into Hickory start coming into the gay club. The gay men and the lesbian moms come now into the club. The gay men and the lesbian Hispanic people come into the club now. So that on any given Saturday night, you look around the club, every community that is in Hickory is now represented now inside that club. Which is another example of we're everywhere. And that, I think is very neat to look and see a microcosm of the entire community in the gay community in the nightclub on a Saturday night.

LA: Hmm.

EF: Now, do I know those people? No. And you know, again it's just like the black community or the Hispanic community, you know one, you know everybody. Well you don't. But on any given Saturday night, we know

four or five people who are down there. I know a lot of faces, I may not be able to put a name with it.

LA: Which is true in any community. Have you formed any of your own traditions of special ways to celebrate holidays or birthdays or other significant events?

EF: Well, we're merging to other cultures here because Thomas is a vegetarian.

LA: Ok

EF: So obviously when I think of Thanksgiving, I think of turkey and everything that goes with it.

TF: He won't let me do a tofu turkey.

EF: Which is not exactly what Thomas comes up with (laughing). Well and I'm learning that. I mean there's, it's not like you know, you can't eat.

LA: Hmm.

EF: We no longer buy meat for the house. Hmm, when we go out, I may very well order something that looks good but you know again, I'm not cooking and he's not cooking two separate meals so there's no reason to keep meat in the house.

TF: But I guess we celebrate holidays pretty much the same as, as I'm sure most other people do as well, you know Christmas and Thanksgiving and birthdays and anniversaries and

LA: What I'm asking is how do you do that because everybody actually has a different way, everybody has a different definition of the Thanksgiving meal and what should be included or you know, so is there one, is there, is there a holiday that stands out in the way you do it or a very memorable Christmas or something or something very special?

EF: Well the first Christmas in this house was neat. Because I lived in the other house when I met Thomas. And so that was I did Christmas that year the way it had



always been done. And he kind of just accepted that.

TF: Went along with everything.

EF: But when we came over here then we started doing stuff more together because this was our house as opposed to that house being my house. And so we do move the furniture, I mean the tree has a place it goes, and we you know, we, we settled in on that and stockings have places they go on the fireplace and and things of that nature, obviously both of us being adults, we both had Christmas stuff. So, we have established places in the house that his Christmas stuff and my Christmas stuff goes, they are together, I'm not saying we divide the house or anything, but he has a little set of drummers that go under the tree. And so you know, we've merged those.

TF: And we have since done a lot of house cleaning in that area too because Ed had a lot of traditional Christmas ornaments and decorations and I have always been I guess much more contemporary, lots of glass and stuff like that and I think the first year that we moved into this house was the first year that we had an all glass tree with all glass Christmas ornaments, which is something that I usually do. And I thought that was very special because that really made me begin to feel like I was a part of this, this life in this house instead of everything always being his way. So we've kind of combined the two now.

EF: And we'll make an effort to get to any family function that you know either report up to my parents or um, if they are trying to get everyone together at a particular time at Christmas, then we will adjust our schedule to try to do that. I guess we've been to Greensboro, which is where I'm from.

LA: Uh huh.

EF: For the last couple of Thanksgivings, with a child, if Brit is going to be around, we will, and since he is in Wyoming, we'll also accommodate our schedules.

LA: And Brit is?

EF: My son.

TF: Last Thanksgiving, I drove down, I was driving, Ed was sitting next to me, behind me was Ed's ex wife and their son in the other seat. There was all four of us going down, that was Thanksgiving, wasn't it? And we get along, you know, just fine and we went down to a really nice Thanksgiving.

LA: That's wonderful.

TF: His son is absolutely amazing, he is the most sensitive and very aware of other people's needs and feelings, kind of a person, he's extremely bright and he's just non-judgmental as far as it goes, I mean he he doesn't put any kinds of labels on anybody. And so he's been really wonderful about the whole situation. About accepting me in anyway because I'm Ed's first partner.

EF: One wife and one partner so far.

TF: Ed is my second.

LA: Ok. Um, you are very active within the gay community here. I think that's fair to say.

TF: Extremely fair to say.

LA: Ok. Uh, could you share some of the ways that you are involved, you mentioned starting the group.

EF: Right. And that filled a need. I mean there was political reason behind that because I did not see a visible gay community

LA: Hmm.

EF: There was also the personal desire to meet gay men. I mean it's not, when you come out that everyone calls you up on the phone and says, you know, hey good, I'm one more person towards my toaster oven type thing. It's you don't know anybody. And you are very isolated immediately because your nongay friends have no idea what to do with you. So, you know, you need human contact so, that was a reason for getting that going, to try

and to try to raise the visibility a little bit. The other group, which is by far now my favorite group, is the mixed group and it's also for human contact and family contact in the sense of gay and lesbian, there are still times, and probably most of the time and me maybe more so even than Thomas, where you have certain guards up when you are out in the community. And when you are at a gay and lesbian gathering all those drop. And so you are totally relaxed as opposed to having an element of restraint or an element of guard in place. By having those groups active, hopefully we're making it possible. (break in interview—change from Side A to Side B) ... Hopefully less and less necessary to have as many guards in place as much of the time as it was five years ago. I mean I already know that it's not as necessary as it was five years ago and that's good as far as the larger Hickory community is concerned. By the same token, it's not like being in Provincetown in summertime or Key West... [or other] gay and lesbian, travel destinations, which you can [let your] guard down again completely and totally one hundred percent of the time.

TF: Ok, I don't have that feeling at all, I mean, I've been gay all my life.

LA: Hmmm.

TF: I mean, I told my parents when I was seventeen and I knew before that. And I've never had a problem with my family members or nothing, I mean so I've, I've been out since I was very young. So my need to mix and mingle constantly are most with other gay people isn't extremely strong. I mean, you know, I'm thirty five now so I mean that's something that I've been there, done that kind of thing and I mean I'm comfortable just about anywhere I go.

LA: One stereo type with, with AIDS is that it's still a gay disease and I know you are also involved with ALFA [AIDS Foothills Leadership Alliance] and I also recognize the stereotype. Um, but how did you become involved with ALFA and how do you see that as um, talk a little bit about your role with it.

EF: Ok. Um, ok, and remember I'm a member or the

larger community

LA: Yes.

EF: So if you are a member of the larger community and you've been wrestling with whether or not you are gay and then you have finally decided that you are and then you wrestle with whether or not you are going to come out. And you decide you are going to do that, where do you plug into the gay community. Well, if you have been living in the non-gay community and you have been reading in the magazines and newspapers, obviously the way to plug into the gay community is to get involved with a gay service organization because AIDS is a gay disease. And so even though you may not particularly want to partner up with someone who is HIV positive, you know from reading in the newspaper and magazines that there are people who are not positive who also volunteer time with the local AIDS service organization. Also believing that one needs to put back into a community that one lives in, some public service time, I volunteered to be the attorney for the board of the local AIDS service organization... that filled two needs. It let me do some public service in a community that I wanted to do some public service in, it also let me start meeting people in that community. And once you start meeting people, then you meet other people. And so quite frankly out of that, came the men's group because I finally knew enough men to say why don't we get together and form a group that maybe will do some work... but will also be a social group where we can get together um, once a month and sit down and talk about things that interest us. And it kind of just grew from that. I am also

LA: So that would it be fair to say that it also served as a network?

EF: Sure. I mean two things that I believe very strongly in are that one, you keep your options open, as many options as you can possibly have as long as possible. I mean, obviously at some point, no matter what the situation is, you need to make a decision, but you keep your options open. The second thing is that you network. The only way to get anything done is to network, to know people. And, and that, that was serving

both of those.

LA: That probably characterizes both of your professions too.

EF: Certainly, people want to see every house for sale in Hickory before they choose one,

TF: That's the truth

EF: People want to know what all of their options are when they come in with a legal problem.

TF: And see that goes back again to coming out on a daily basis because every time I put somebody in my car, almost always somehow that subject will come up something of that nature which might make me uncomfortable or them uncomfortable, I mean I have a big human rights campaign sticker on the back of my car right next to my realtor logo, so.

EF: But you have to know what the sticker means.

TF: Right. And people will ask what does that mean? You know so then I have to explain. And I have two ways of explaining it depending on what I think the person can handle. It's also the exact same symbol as the um, equal housing opportunity act.

LA: Hmm.

TF: So depending on what I think that person can handle is which description they get.

EF: And you know, again, in normal conversation, when you meet somebody, typical first questions are you married, what do you do? Do you have children, and when you respond, no I have a partner, then you are getting into an area where someone may be uncomfortable with where a normal conversation took them. And so again, I have never stuck out my hand and said Hi, I'm Ed Farthing, your gay attorney. That's just not, you know, it's totally irrelevant to why the person may be in my office.

LA: Mmm.

EF: But Thomas's picture is on my desk. Um, there are things around the office that may catch somebody's eye and they may ask what it is there you are, you are in an area that has nothing to do with why that person is in your office, and you make a decision, am I coming out to this person, are we going to try to educate a little bit here? That may very well depend on how your day is going and what is supposed to follow that particular appointment and whether you have time to go there or not. It's just you, no day is ever dull.

TF: That's true.

EF: We wrestle through those kinds of questions. And there are many times when I smile inside because I know the person across the desk has no clue and if they did, they would not be sitting across the desk. So there are other times when I am tickled to death to be able to do something for a gay man or a lesbian that he or she could not have accomplished on their own because my knowledge of the law allows me to get them something they want or where Thomas might have a gay couple in the car and for them, they can relax.

TF: And be very comfortable.

EF: And talk with him about exactly what their needs are as far as a house is concerned without offending the real estate person that they are working with.

LA: So there are clear advantages too then?

TF: I've had several referrals from other cities and states.

LA: Hmm.

TF: From other realtors calling into this community trying to find a gay realtor. Which I am on the internet as such and two gals from Tennessee just moved down here not too long ago to take on a new position at one of the big restaurants here and their realtor up there called down here, searched and found me, and that's how we hooked up.

LA: Just providing a different comfort level.

TF: Sure.

LA: Well, and I think in, in that case, there would be similarity with some of the different ethnic groups that... maybe a Hispanic couple would probably feel more comfortable at least with somebody who spoke Spanish.

TF: Hmmm.

LA: Frequently some of those needs would be very similar because you have a better understanding.

EF: And, you know again, I, think a substantial amount of our time is devoted to the gay community but obviously we put time into our relationship. We each do things that the other is interested in and we have each developed interest that the other has.

LA: Give me some examples.

EF: Thomas is about as apolitical of a person as god has ever created and last month, the North Carolina Association of Realtors (laugh) put out a magazine showing how the community was very diverse.

TF: On the front cover of our monthly issue, it said diversity and it had black couples, Hispanic couples, a black and white couple, a single mom with child, a single dad with child, you know the whole nine yards, except, you know, there was no gay couple on the cover so I of course, would have never even thought twice or would have noticed something like that but I did and I emailed them that very day about you know, that they needed to broaden their definition of diversity. And, you know, brought them to the fact that there are certainly an awful lot of gay realtors in the United States.

LA: Um, what are some of the other interests that you have developed together, not part of your professional life and maybe not necessarily a part of the gay community?

EF: Cooking vegetarian dishes and gardening.

LA: Gardening?

EF: You could have never gotten me out, I've always lived in Condos and Townhouses and downtown areas. And then I came here and he is very into gardening and everything and so we've, he's really gotten me a lot interested in plants and things of that nature, which I've never had an interest in.

LA: Was that the yellow iris out here.

TF: Or whatever it is, given to us and we planted it there and

EF: And it obviously likes the spot because a couple of years ago, it was one little plant and it has now taken over but, you know there are some funny stories because, you know whenever you are getting into something new, the first year we lived over here, the first summer, I had tilled the whole back of the yard and said this is going to be the garden and Thomas was getting totally into the garden and we planted twelve or fourteen not because I wanted to, yellow squash plants.

TF: See that's usually my overkill, if I'm going to do it, you know we've got to do it all the way.

EF: Thomas, I assured him one or two would be a gracious plenty.

TF: No, it can't be.

EF: Needless to say, we had more squash than you could possibly (laughing) ever deal with.

TF: Couldn't even give it away.

EF: We don't plant quite that much anymore, Thomas was so happy.

TF: You know they were growing so fast and so many you couldn't pick them fast enough and so they would get to be like two feet long. (laughing) And so anyway, I



learned my lesson. (laughing) I listen a lot closer now to everything he tells me.

LA: So gardening and vegetarian cooking and

EF: Yeah, and well my taste in music has definitely broadened a generation. You know, I, having had, having a teenager in the house, I knew what was out there and thank goodness neither of us are really into rap so I have not had to learn rap, but since he's younger than me, I've definitely become more aware of singers and songs that are out now.

TF: Videos, things of that nature.

EF: Right.

LA: Hmm.

TF: But I think when I came along too, I think you may have gotten a lot more involved in art and things of that nature, especially on volunteering and because you know, when I first came to Hickory, I was with the symphony and worked ungodly hours with a nonprofit organization, which I'm sure you are used to. And so he got roped into everything I was involved with and so that's another area that we grew in together. And still do a lot.

LA: So you were [on] their staff, not as a musician.

TF: Not as a musician. Strictly business.

EF: And that's been good, I mean you know, hearing it, you broaden your horizons.

LA: Hmm.

EF: I hope he doesn't read this, my father has been old since I knew him. And I know that's a state of mind, not a state of health because he's now eighty and still in excellent health. Or rapidly approaching eighty. But I have you know, sometimes you learn not from the positive but from the negative. And so, I have tried to stay in a younger state of mind and that Thomas has definitely

helped with. I'm sure I go out more than I would otherwise.

TF: And I go out less.

EF: Um, yeah (laughing). We're sort of getting, you know, to the middle. And I'm, I'm learning every day. Again, how to build a relationship with an adult male. It's more than just a friendship. So we, yeah, with interests, you know, with interests, it was nice to get rid of some of the housework, but by the same token, it's nice to have help in the yard. Each of us knows how to do things that the other doesn't know how to do as well. And we're great fun when neither of us know what we are doing, but we're gonna do it anyway. So you know, on house repairs or on trying something. The first time we went out to pick fabric or a wall color, we had not been in a relationship that long. When we moved over here and the relationship survived and the first [thing] we did was wallpaper the dining room. So we had to choose the wallpaper and then we hung it.

TF: Which I had never done before and won't do again.

LA: (laughs)

EF: I think he understood afterwards why I said I hope the relationship survives.

LA: (laughs)

TF: It looks great but as you can tell that's the only room that has wallpaper. (laughing)

LA: How long have you been together?

TF: Since '95.

LA: So that's a good long time.

TF: Going on five years.

EF: Well... I met him shortly after he was physically in Hickory, and we dated some over the summer and into the fall and then decided to merge the household just



before Christmas. Around Thanksgiving, which is another interesting concept, without a marriage, you always wonder where your anniversary is. You know there's one there but you never are quite sure which date to pick. Was it the date you met, was it the date you actually went out on your first date, was it the date you merged the household. And since when you actually decided to merge the household, you know each other so well that you probably have not stopped and looked at a calendar to determine exactly what day that was. And if we pick an anniversary day or a holy union day and do that process, it would probably be away from Christmas and Thanksgiving or even birthdays because then that's another excuse to go buy something and give each other a present (laughing).

LA: That's wonderful. Hmm, I can't think of anything else right now, is there anything I haven't covered that you want to speak about?

EF: Gay age.

LA: What is that?

EF: Gay age.

TF: Yeah, gay age.

LA: Gay age, ok, tell me about that.

TF: I'm thirty-five and Ed is fifty-one. And actually as far as being gay goes, I am older than Ed, more experienced and [it] kind of goes back to what I said earlier about not having to rely on that social gay group that as a strong point in my life. And there really is a difference I think in people who have been out all their life or a lot longer than a lot of the people who have just come out of the last two three or four years. You can explain.

LA: So do you count, like when you come out?

TF: It's like a maturity, it's like a maturity, just like with, with you know, being ten, fifteen, twenty years old. I think the longer that you've been gay and have been out, the more comfortable you are with certain, with certain

stances and situations. And you go a lot farther, mentally and spiritually, I think too, than somebody that's only been out for a very short period of time. What's important to somebody that's just come out is not important to somebody that has been out a long time.

LA: Can you give an example?

TF: Politics. I mean I'm not on a bandwagon to jump up and scream and shout, you know, here I am, you know, give me this and give me that as much as I think people when they first come out.

LA: Hmm.

TF: You know, I went through that and I am more now because I'm with Ed and he's brought so many more different points to my awareness but, you got anything to add?

EF: It, I, some of that may depend on when you come out, and when you start wrestling with it internally. My generation, which Thomas is in if you go every twenty years as a generation but someone who is my age typically came out in their mid- to late-twenties. Now the average age is mid teens for someone who is growing up now. That's probably because of actually having the issue in the popular press.

TF: Yeah the social awareness is so much stronger than it has been.

EF: Correct, but it didn't quite frankly occur to me that you know, I might be gay until I was well into my twenties, married, and had a child. And immediately you say no, this is wrong, I'm married and I have a child. I mean all the physical evidence is you are certainly not. But when you go back and look at it in hindsight and again refer to gay age. My teenage years and into my twenties were the nongay culture and me trying to fit what it expected of me instead of me carving out a life of my own. So when I came out, I was a teenager all over again because I had to.

TF: It's a new life.

EF: I had to resocialize my entire life and I had to get it in order and figure out then what I wanted to do, which is exactly what you do as a teenager. So even though it's different and you don't have to live a whole year to get a whole gay year, when you come out, you get two or three all at once. So if you come out and you are thirteen or fourteen, and you are forty, when you are forty-one, you moved up to fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen. So they go faster.

LA: (laughing)

EF: So I'm about to catch him.

TF: Think of it as experiences and, things of that nature.

LA: Yeah.

EF: Sure. I really, a comment that I distinctly remember, again being Presbyterian, I was talking with my minister and he was having trouble with the fact that one of his elders, in his church had come out of the closet. And I, I asked him one day, I said well, you know, how are things going as far as your position is concerned and me individually. He said well, I think I'm getting through that, he said the only thing I haven't reached a decision on is what I would do if you came to me and asked me to perform some sort of a holy union ceremony. And I just laughed and said Matt, I'm still trying to figure out who leads when you go dancing.

LA: (laughs)

EF: I said (laughing) don't worry about holy union ceremonies at this particular moment in my life. And he was a little stereotypical on his part in that he assumed I immediately had someone permanently and physically in my life. It didn't dawn on him that I had to figure out who I was first. And part of that process is just like a teenager when you go to the sock hop or in high school when you start mingling with people and learning how to dance with them and socialize with them. I didn't have a gay history. So when I got into a group of gay men, I had very little to talk about with them because I had not built a common bond that I wasn't coming from the same

background. Right, the vocabulary I didn't know. So again I think that's what you mean when you say gay age. If you come out at seventeen, then you may revert back to twelve or thirteen again, dealing with issues that you might be dealing with at twelve, thirteen or fourteen. But by the time you reach twenty, everything has merged back together. And I don't want to sound like, you know, there's a big dichotomy because I'm not sure there is right now. But I commented again at a church meeting, I said this is wonderful because your parents used to always say oh if I could go back and do it all over again and know what I know now. And I just laughed and said that's exactly what I'm doing, you know, I'm forty-five years old, I know everything a forty-five year old knows but I'm experiencing it like a teenager because it is all new and it's exciting and I'm learning all of this stuff all at one time. Of course it's frightening as well. But you have this kick of energy that the director of the National Human Rights Campaign, which is a gay and lesbian lobbying organization, said you can take the energy you found on coming out of the closet and bottle it, there is enough power there to fuel a small town for about a year. That's very true.

LA: Hmm.

TF: It's such an uplifting experience and at the same time it just takes a huge weight off your back. And you know, when you finally decide I'm not going to live this lie and you know, just come out and just be yourself and just do things the way you want to do it, I mean it really is powerful.

EF: But you have to let everybody make their own choice, I mean now that I'm out, I want everybody to be out but I go back to the position I was in and say in my life, these are the reasons I was using not to be out or these were the reasons I felt important not to be out and they've got whatever reasons there are and to them, that's a very valid reason. And that's the only person who counts. The person who's got the situation they are dealing with on an individual basis.

TF: And I personally feel that it's usually employment, I think that a lot of the reason why people aren't out is

because of a job. Like, [I] couldn't think of many schoolteachers in the area, of course that tend to be a little more closeted because of their position.

LA: Hmm.

TF: And their fear of losing their position.

EF: We've got a friend down in Newton who recently came out who gets very frustrated because he can't find everybody in the gay or lesbian community because there are so many people closeted. And he would like to get them involved in political issues or things of that nature. And of course, I went back and see that's where I was even more so three or five years ago.

LA: That links back to gay age.

EF: Sure it is.

TF: Being a baby (laughing)

EF: I was a teenager, you know, invincible, can do no wrong, full steam ahead.

TF: Plus, I think he is extremely strong in the political realm anyway. You know, that's always been, I think, his forte so I mean you know, he's really trying to get the gay population in the community now very political. Which isn't happening. I think it is more and more but it's a slow process. This new group versus the old, older established group is much more political than the other group.

LA: Now would you say that, trying to figure out how to keep this open ended, that if, that fits in, it's not going to be, um, fits in with being in the South and being a fairly conservative place anyway, I mean, Hickory is a relatively conservative town, wouldn't you say? And so, I mean, how do you, isn't that part of fitting in?

TF: I would kind of have to say yes and no about Hickory being a conservative town. Coming from Dallas, Texas where there is a huge, tremendous, I mean miles, miles and miles and blocks worth of a downtown section that's

basically all gay and very well known for that. And even in the malls and stuff in Dallas, you would see guys and girls hanging all over each other and walking down and it, it wasn't near as big of an issue as it was when I came up this direction but it, it's toned down a little bit more. I moved to Charlotte before I moved to Hickory and I have never had any trouble or been confronted with everybody and I've always been very open.

LA: I mean, I'm just thinking that this tends to be conservative place anyway so that people who were you know, before you came out, if you are conservative, a lot of the same.

TF: Yes and you stay that, yes.

LA: Lifestyles attitudes, not necessarily politically conservative but

EF: Right. And I think that's a stereotype that goes both ways.

LA: Yeah.

EF: I think people stay in the closet because they view Hickory as a very conservative Southern town and if they would come on out, they would find that yes there is that element in town but there is a huge population that does not fit that stereotype.

TF: Half of which is large, larger than the conservative population.

EF: Right, right. And a very supportive population. Um, Hickory has a huge gay community as do most towns, but that should not be a surprise because Hickory is a very creative town.

TF: Furniture?

EF: Furniture, both in fabrics as well as the design of the furniture itself.

TF: And then the designers, you know.

EF: The apparel industry is strong in Hickory, the fabric industry, the sock industry, I can think of people that I know that are family in every one of those industries. Um, again, not to fit stereotypes, but gay men do have a certain flair with interior design. Think of all the showrooms that all the furniture manufacturers have throughout the United States but particularly in the High Point area.

LA: Hmm.

EF: Their designers live in Hickory. A lot of them are family, I'm not saying they all are by any means but certainly a large percentage of them are. These are people that are fairly well off. So again... that's left others of them, um, come out, and kind of follow in their footsteps. And again, my father asked me once why I had the small rainbow sticker on my car, and I said I like it there, I mean, I'm not denying it, I like it there, but I put it on my car because I can and I know what it feels like when I see another rainbow sticker on another car. You wave, you may have no idea who that person is.





# **The Immigrant Experience in the Catawba Valley**

## **Bekri Sulimna interviewed by Christy Butler**

Twenty years ago Bekri Suliman arrived in the United States as a political refugee from Ethiopia. This interview gives the reader a profound sense of the difference between daily life in a poor developing nation and the United States. For Bekri Suliman the past twenty years have been a modern-day odyssey to find a stable world for him and his family.

Mr. Suliman's date of birth is 11/21/51.

CB: Mr. Suliman, where was your birthplace?

Bekri Suliman: Harrar. [Mr. Suliman later added that he was born November 12, 1951]

CB: Where is that?

BS: Ethiopia, East Africa.

CB: Can you tell me a little about your childhood memories?

BS: Oh, well yes ma'am. I come in a large family. My dad [was] the governor of Harare province and my mama [was] the housewife and we have sixteen, I have sixteen brothers and sisters. Seven boys and the rest are girls, many girls. And all of them born before I was born except one or two I think. And I start my education in Harare province first since my dad and mom, my dad is a Muslim, my Mom is a Christian, I have to learn both languages, speak Arabic, English, Amharic, Harare, Tegra, Somali, seven different language. So I start my education in Harare province in Muslim school, then graduate the fifth grade, learn how to write and read Arabic and Amharic, both, learn to write and read both of them... [after] the third grade was started. Then I left my place of birth and moved to Addis Ababa, ... when that was complete, I went to for high school, ... I complete the twelfth grade and [was] accepted in medical science, University of Georgia. First year completed there, I decided to start work. I was hired by Mobile Oil Company... I was a sales person then become a sales manager resigned from there...

[Mr. Suliman then held several different jobs in Georgia. He was a sales supervisor, and also worked in an international corporation as a purchaser. Then he started

his own business.]

[Mr. Suliman then proceeds to discuss political affairs in Ethiopia in the late 1970s and 1980s.]

BS: ... the country divided into three parts who knows who rules the country but today, problems. Maybe you've heard or maybe not... Every day, over six hundred kids being shot dead. And the culture, we don't want to know about, they pull you in there, they shave your head with... broken glass, they shave your head. They beat you like dog and finally find out what some what people in my country were very into politics, I was involved with politics, they come and scared everything at arm, they put me in jail... [I] forget the country and start working with another company, just for myself. Then... one of my brothers who was hired out of, away from the country... To revenge, they finally, they put me in jail, they told me I had to get out of the country. So it's a life and death, I have one day left to be executed, to be killed. The final day, they have a holiday celebration, a big festival to get the money contribution from the people. Well, I think I am going to be dying the next day and we have been asked to contribute so much. I am the only one out of five of us to be executed the next morning. Well, I take my chances, I wouldn't pay them anything, I told them I don't have any money. Then they have the big party and everybody get drunk the guard slept on, everybody asleep, we are the only one punished because the next day we are gonna get killed. That's why they didn't give us a drink. In a way, this is sad for us, in a way it's not.

Anyway, at the very end of the evening about ten o'clock when everybody asleep and the guard is drunk, we see the chance because their uh, their jail it didn't have door or window, it's just wide open because they know if you cross the line, they shoot, they don't ask questions and the prisoner, all of us be aware of that. We don't cross, we don't go, but this is my last chance, in the morning, I get

killed, regardless, let me try and die or wait to die. One of the two. I asked one of my friends, get out. They refused, they don't wanna go. They stake a chance, they say no, but I take my chance. I jump the fence, count to three, jump the fence, I succeeded. Run to my Daddy's place, talk to him, what I'm going to [do], ... I told him I'm going West. I got from him fifty dollars and start walking backwards. I walked about five miles and catch a train and got to where I was because I know it inside and outside, how to escape from there. Then the next day, I called my brother and talked to him on telephone. I stay at his house and the very next night, I fled out of the country and started my own journey. Almost two hundred or three hundred miles, walked day and night, through the desert, through the jungle, through the mud, in and out, finally on the fifth day, I made it to the, port, to... Somalia. I asked for my exilement, stayed there for three year, while I was there, I was helped by the United Nation, I work for a year and finally the American Embassy took me. I... was helping them there for six months tried to ...distinguish which... refugee or political refugee the United States government give them exilement [sic]. And finally, the undercover ...heard that I was there helping the refugee the undercover guy tried to kill me, I stay in the embassy for three days, day and night, without stepping out and finally they put me in the plane and and sent me to the United States.

And that's how I get here, in 1980, December, 1980, only two or three refugee possible, that's how I get here. And as soon as I get here, within three four days, Northwestern Bank give me the job. I start as a teller, working there. For six years (coughs) then I join the college, I studied data processing, computers science, get my certificate there and start working Sears with the catalog department finally make it to electronic service. On the banking industry, I wasn't left as a teller, I was... assistant officer, security officer, auditor, I did it all and then they transfer me to Charlotte. I work as Cash management and then they transfer me to international department and I can't, I done that for a year and I don't like Charlotte, come back home to Hickory. Alright, question?

CB: Do you uh, still see your brothers and sisters?

BS: No, I haven't seen any of them, I have one in California, I have one in Canada, I haven't heard from them. From the last I have been here, almost nineteen years, no call.

CB: What's your favorite type of food?

BS: Um, oh, American... I like all of them, I have no choice, anything you can move, I ate.

CB: [pause] so how many languages did you say you speak?

BS: I speak seven languages, I like three of them, read and write, English, Arabic, and Amharic. Arabic is the third largest language spoken in the world. I speak Arabic without no question. As a matter of fact now, when, with my new job in the furniture company, I meet a lot of of Arabic people and they were surprised to find a person in Hickory who speaks Arabic and some of the Italian people also calls close to Spanish but it's not real and I speak some Italian also.

CB: Do you have any fun memories like with your brothers and sisters, like when you were younger?

BS: Oh yes, every now and then, that's the time loneliness and boring times, every now and then you remember. That's why I keep myself busy having three or four jobs. I don't want to take the time to sit and be depressed and think about what happened in the past.

CB: Can you tell me one of your fun memories?

BS: Well, when we are a kid, especially on holidays when we have new clothes, it's not like today's kids, when we grow up, we have two three different kind of clothes. One is for holiday, the second set is for Sunday, go to church, and the third for school for fun time you wear your shoes once a week for Sunday, your other pair, when the new ones they die, you move them to weekly and the old ones for every day. It's not like today, it's the most fun part (clears throat) to put the new clothes and new shoes the new clothes and dress up and walk up and down in the city.

CB: Do you have any favorite (clears throat) church memories?

BS: Over there or here?

CB: Hmm, both.

BS: I love... Holy Trinity. They treat me like a family. I treat them, I believe... because when I need help they are the first people they extend their arm and they pick me up and they give me cloth on my back, shelter, [unintelligible]. Back home, yes, we like... call it, Eastern Holiday, Africans celebrate three days back home. Just to get, having fun. Close their offices, stores, everything closed for three days that's the biggest holiday, I'll never forget.

CB: Ok, um, tell me a little bit more about your education, like um, grade school, did you go to grade school or like middle school like we have up in the America here?

BS: Ok, back then the school is divided in terms first, I don't know how much you know terms for [silence in tape] in parts, divided in four terms each, three months. Every three months you have exam and you have a break and later on they change it to semester, instead of having three, you have two. Ok, and the school, our school is divided into three groups. The elementary school, the junior high, and high school. Ok, well when you go first school, your compulsory, elementary school, according your religion, according your area, you got to take either French, instead of Arabic, or you got to take Italian instead of English. It depends on what part of Ethiopia you live in. You drop those after Elementary and high school compulsory language, Arabic and Amharic and English, those are two language. In some areas, French and Amharic, in some areas, Italic and Amharic, Amharic is a wide spoken language in the country. The country has over 99 different language or over 100 different language spoken but they want... international Amharic, national language spoken. When you finish the junior high school, you can take exam. All students from the empire takes the same exam on the same day on the same time. All of them are given credit for if you pass,

you join high school, otherwise, you are out. You have to repeat previous class to take that exam. Then you are gonna start your high school. Our high School is not like a circle. Every class after you pass once the last year of junior high and throughout your college life, any test, any exam is three hours. Regardless what kind of class you take, it is three hours. If you finish, you are lucky in three hours, one class, one of them is three hours. You start practicing the last part of your junior high. Once you get high school, every class, every test they give you is three hours, not less. Even though they give you three hour, you don't finish it. The history instructor once give you a test in history, expect you that you know twenty terms. Not less than that. Even before they look at it, you have got to have that many terms down. In geography or chemistry, all of them, the same thing. At least 70 things, you have to draw, you have to do everything. It's step by step, one mistake, you are out. The college, we have one university, around twelve thousand students, the college needs only 2500, you can imagine how many people, how much you have to fight you have got to be outstanding to go to college. It is not college like the American states, you pay the money, you can get in, no, there is no college like that, they are hand picked. Twelve thousand, only two thousand five hundred or three thousand that is the most they pick, but not all. So the best students... can join the college out of the worst, you just start working. Any place you might find.

CB: Ok, (clears throat). Can you tell me any like differences or similarities in Ethiopia vs. the United States?

BS: Oh no. In the United States is completely different from any other part of the world I have been in. And I have been in Saudi Arabia, I have been in France, I've been in... part of Africa. And America is completely different from any other part of the world. You have a lot of freedom, that's the main thing in the United States. Unbelievable, the sky is the limit. Anywhere in the world, you don't get that freedom. While most like some it is hard to explain what kind of freedom you have and how much you have got here. You don't have that kind of freedom. Your freedom is limited, when I say freedom, people thinks especially teenagers thinks because dad



and mom tell you to come home at a certain time come home at a certain time, that's not freedom. Freedom people cried for, sacrificed their life, that's not a real freedom. Yet you can write, you can talk your opinion and nobody cares, seems to care. You are expressed what you think is right over there you can't do it unless otherwise you are find your own bullets at once. This is America from the work, employment side, if you are willing to work there is plenty opportunity in the United States. In Africa, if there is one job offered, you find thousand people lined up...they have one job, you can find five thousand people lined up to get [it]. In America, you drop one job, you get another job. It just, your freedom, your opportunity is unlimited. That's the big difference, in Europe, you have the same thing. Like I say, you don't get clothes as you want, as you please. But isn't everything short there? Your shopping is limited, your income is limited. It's not like here. Here hourly wages, they don't consider you hourly wages, they just give you monthly so much, that's it. And don't compare it sixty-five cents a dollar a day or five dollar a day at most, ten dollar a day and high school completed, if you complete high school with outstanding, willing to work, ten dollar a day. And you got to go to college and graduate to make fifteen dollar a day, or twenty dollar a day. This is the difference I can't explain to the kids, they don't understand what I am trying to say.

CB: What's your, what kind of food did you eat in Ethiopia?

BS: Oh, that's traditional food, we don't make that here. And in part of the United States. We call it there, there we have our own flat bread to eat with, of course the chicken and the beef is the same. But the ingredients and the spices, you don't have them here. Of course some did have them from out of Ethiopia, and they imported, that's why have this. But nowadays, for twenty years, things change and they won't come here. I can't go back and get it.

CB: (laughs) How did it feel to have so many brothers and sisters? Did you [fight]?

BS: It's true, having brothers and sisters teach you to

share. That's the only thing that I see the difference in America. Here Americans have only one or two kids and everything that they see, they want to own it, everything that they have, is mine. That's all they know. In Africa, having a, coming in a big family, they teach you how to share, you have a glass of water, you don't drink the whole thing for yourself or pour it to the sink. You can't do that. You share it with your brother or your sister. You share everything you have got, that's how you start sharing and living together and every time you go to the society, you fit right in because you know how to share, you know, you know the second person, where his stand is, you don't push him, you don't overlap him, you just you stay and share everything together. The bigger the family like working horse, to share. But here in America, they have only one kid, everything they get is mine. Everything is his piece. And when he come to the world, everything is the same, never been punished, never been competed, when he try to compete with outsiders, things are complicated. Right?

CB: Uh huh, that's right.

BS: (laughs)

CB: How did you feel when you came to the United States for the first time?

BS: Well, I felt fine because I been in the Embassy, I work with Americans back home also. The only difference I find is the weather, ok. Here in the United States, where I was is 110 degree temperature and if the temperatures falls over 85 and humidity around 80, we have to wear heavy cloth, bundle up like you have it here in the winter. And the same thing when I first come, the temperature where I was around 110 humidity 95, back there they call it the wintertime and uh, summertime here was wintertime when I come to the United States at first and got to Hickory, the only thing hate about the country is all the weather, the wintertime, December, very cold, I hate the stuff and I don't want to get out of it... I need to get away from the cold. When the spring comes, and the summer, I really enjoy the weather and feel like home every summer because here, I feel like home.



CB: Well, out of all the jobs that you have had, what's has been your most favorite?

BS: Well sales is my favorite. And I think I am ... a salesman in the beginning, of course, I did the computer programming for a small company, [but the computer] hurts my eye [so] that's out of question. The banking industry, I really loved to do it, to see how it works, but most of all, the sales industry, for me, I enjoy work and doing it.

CB: Why do you enjoy sales because of the people or?

BS: Meet people and the challenge, sales is a challenge, its not just giving him a piece of product and pay and go, that's not what when I say sales. Sales means to convince the customer how the product works and show them how it works and what kind of a advantage you are going to get from the differences when you go through the difference for them, thanks to technology, every day you have a new product. You are not stuck with the same kind over and over, but they change every six months, every year, you get a chance and you have so many different kinds and for every meter of the customer you explain to them and help them and convince them and you when the customer willing to buy they get satisfied with what they have. One, you help the customer, the next time he see you, he respect you, give you full respect because you help him out and showed him how it works. Two, you will be happy when you get your paycheck. Of course you work a lot and in a short period of time, you get more pay for you convincing the customer. That's what makes me happy. So you see it's not easy job.

CB: No, it's not. It's not. Um, you, the city that you grew up in, how is it different from the United States, like does it have like the tall buildings that we have or?

BS: No, no, no. They don't have the buildings, they were all built a long time ago. Uh, I don't know about two thousand, three thousand, old city and the population over that place, that city, 600,000. They don't have a tall building. It's not like America, Hickory when I first come, got some ten thousand or seven thousand, very very dispersed. Over there, people lives together. And

there is no birth control. That's why you have a lot of kids. Same as the Spanish. Because the Spanish, of course they don't have birth control. That's why you see a problem with kids. In Africa, you see the same thing. When we, when we grow, we grew up, the major of the richness of regards how many kids you have. There was a competition how many kids they can have. And today, you call it birth control, I don't know whether they have that or, it's been twenty years.

CB: Did they um, farm in Ethiopia or what was their, what was their livelihood?

BS: Yes, oh yeah. Farming and trading. Farming, all the primitive way, not like America, they don't have tractors...they farm the same way of course few other places, few places, you know, they have technology, they have tractors... [they trade] hide and skin and coffee, exporting the coffee, that's the way the country lives.

CB: What did they grow? Besides coffee?

BS: They have coffee and mmm, different kinds of grains, beans, all those grow so and tobacco, they have tobacco.

CB: So they, they had to have a lot of children to do the harvesting and?

BS: Right. The machinery is not manually there, that's why they count how many kids they have and citrus fruits, because since they are...you do have a lot of citrus fruits. To import into Somalia and the other desert countries.

CB: Well you've had an interesting life Bekri.

BS: (laughing) Thank you ma'am.

## **Yuliya Annas interviewed by Lydia Austin and Linda Ferguson**

Yuliya Annas was born and experienced childhood in the Soviet Union before the collapse of the Communist Party. In recent years she attended medical school in Russia, then married an American citizen and moved to Hickory. Owing to the different structure of American and Russian colleges and universities, upon arriving in North Carolina she learned that she had to go back and earn a bachelor's degree—which does not exist in Russia—before entering an American medical school. She graduated from Lenoir-Rhyne College in May 2000 and has been admitted to the University of North Carolina Medical School. She consented to two interviews by two different interviewers. Both are presented here.

Lydia Austin: Lydia Austin interviewing Yuliya Annas, 2-26-99, at Lenoir Rhyne College. Ok just tell me about Russia, when you lived in Russia [the Soviet Union], the school system, Ok?

Yuliya Annas: Ok, so usually children, they can, if their mothers cannot sit with them, the mothers can sit with their children legally until the child is three, but a lot of times, mothers have to go to work and so there are like kindergartens available for all ages of children, but they're usually, it's usually, uh, they are usually in different buildings. So there is something like daycare for little babies, usually two to three and then from three to five usually in the same building but they are divided into usually like three groups. The young, the middle group and then kind of like the senior Kindergarten group where they are five and they usually teach you, usually they have classes of drawing and different crafts and the senior group of the Kindergarten, they teach you to read and usually study with plants and animals and eat there and there is usually one hour of sleep and children often go for a walk and they are usually two, um, how do you call them, two teachers, two kindergarten children for about fifteen, eighteen children and my experiences of it were not too terrible but they were stressful because it was awful after, we had breakfast when I was a senior in kindergarten and I could not eat it I was stressed and I just uh, I threw up my every breakfast morning and nobody was sympathetic, they just took me to the uh, elementary kindergarten group and made me eat with the very small kids. That's so that I will be ashamed of myself, that I act like that and that lasted for a year and uh, really teachers didn't think that it was anybody's

problem but mine. And so the food wasn't also too good used a lot of fat and wasn't too tasty. I guess I was kind of picky too. The attitude [of] the children was fine but I don't think it was too good because in Russia, they can spank you and nobody would sue them for you, they can scold you and they can like, make you, make you stand in the corner or isolate you or isolate you in this room and so I was, I was a pretty gentle kid, I was smaller than everybody else so it's kind of difficult to believe now but I was very tiny. Well and I was old as like the last, the oldest side of kids and teachers too. And so then when, usually children go to school so we call it all, elementary, middle and high school just school. And it's all usually in the same, not usually but just all the time, in the same building so you study ten years in the same building. It's usually ten years or eleven-year program. Used to be ten when I studied and now it is eleven years. And you study with the same people. It is usually a class like twenty, twenty-five, sometimes thirty people. One group and you studied with them for all ten, eleven years of your school. And you cannot choose subjects in Russian schools so you have a picked schedule for everybody. And there are also divisions like first three years you have one teacher who teaches all subjects except always music and physical training is always taught by a different teacher. And that from the third grade, you just uh, get the another supervisor, the different supervisor that just teaches any subject, and uh, teach kind of rules that class activities but you have classes with three good high professional students usually, teachers who usually in Russia, Russian teachers, they have five years of education and uh, they don't teach many subjects, usually one teacher teaches one subject like only history, only

math only biology so they, I would say they have equivalence of masters uh, according to American Standards. So I would say in comparison to America suppose our, middle school and high school education is very good and actually, what I study here in college, I studied in middle school, the middle school in Russian school and then high school, that's for sure, like my Biology, so some subjects are here in college are in Russian high school.

I've turn, I like the system of ten or eleven years together of one group of people because um, instead, and studying in one building too with all ages because you get to know people closely and so by the end of the eleventh grade, it's usually, this group is usually like one family. Oh, I have great friends and it's forever, its for your whole life and I think what I notice that Americans a little bit lack this experience of having friends who are like your family. And uh, the studying in the same building makes you see just different ages and you, because when you are a little kid, you see grown ups you get more experiences and I think you mature a little bit early, and uh, usually older students in Russia, they make entertainments for younger students and there is a system that is called the chiefs so from what the sixth grade, you can become a chief of the three, like three grade or seven grade and just kind of supervise, supervise the kids you like. And help them and have different kinds of activities like plays when uh, music, singing, different sports and all kinds of things. And then usually after the high school, we'll have to pass exams and we have to take exams and if we pass them and we go to our universities or institutes.

In Russia, we don't have systems of colleges, we go straight to the university and of the Masters program, something like that and um, usually the program for all professions is five years like teachers and different kind of engineering and there's a lot of others but for medicine, it is six years. So I was in the medical school and I had to study six years and I finished only four years since I moved. And children don't do very well at school. They don't have to go to high school. They can quit the eighth grade and then they have a choice to go to the professional school and then just study something which

doesn't require much, um, much knowledge as far as intelligence, thinking so we just get professionals like mechanics or whatever or repairing houses, something like that. Um, you can go there also to the eleventh grade if you choose to but, but not many people do, and especially because in Russia, the military is obligatory for boys, everybody has to go there after eighteen but if you go to the university or to the five year or six year program, you don't have to go to the military. If you go to the professional school, you have to there so that's why young man usually, they have a challenge. A challenge to get into the university or institute and have a profession just not to go to the military because that's the terrible thing in Russia. And um, they usually do pretty good and um, I would say that most of the boys I know who didn't do very well in high school and were considered naughty and all that, they did very well and studied very well in the universities. So its also kind of comparing to the Americans' schools where you have to take subjects and where you have divisions like dumb classes [in] high school and dumb classes, I don't think that's good because it labels you from high school, I believe that even not being very good in high school, you can even realize your potential later and it is good not to be labeled because in Russia, you go to the university and nobody knows you there, you can just become a different personality and really do very well. I've a lot of good examples of that.

LA: What about marriage?

YA: Marriage, ok marriage. Um, I am married and I am twenty-one. That is not typical for Russia. Usually people used to get married about ten, fifteen years ago, twenty, they used to get married twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, but now because economical conditions are terrible in Russia and uh, people, young family doesn't have any chance to get their own place, they have to live with their parents and they don't have any hope to feed their children so what's the [point] really to get married if you can't have your own place, you can't have your own, your children because you cannot feed them so they usually now just prefer to stay just boyfriends and girlfriends till like twenty-five, twenty-six till time they know they can settle down and be safe? Uh, it's a very critical thing and



some people do marry. Actually, in my university, uh, we, I had several friends, girls they married when they were twenty and they had kids being in the medical school and they had their kids. . . and like in several days, they went to study and a lot of them usually have kids during the exams. And so they will have a kid and then go to the exam. (laughing) It's like all their life at the university. Uh, but it's very difficult, it is, and now in Russia, the rate of death is much higher than the rate of birth and about nine pregnancies from ten aborted. Because women just cannot feed their children.

LA: Is it just the economic status of Russia?

YA: Uh, because of the economics, you get paid less.

LA: Mmmm.

YA: And I would say the prices in Russia are like the United States and a little of them are higher, like the shoes and clothes because we don't have much competition there and because bad weather conditions, you, you need good shoes, you need good coat and fur coat and prices are very high. And uh, food is a little cheaper than here but not all of it and certainly here, I have now find food my cheaper than in Russia but um, average person, retired person gets fifteen dollars per month retirement and that's high. For example, my mother has been an engineer, she projected [designed] chemical plants. Uh, she had been an engineer for, for thirty-five years and now her retirement is fifteen dollars. And uh, my father has been an engineer for thirty-eight years and he is a specialist in transmissions and uh, he was just fired after thirty eight years at the same place and uh, his retirement is also fifteen dollars a month. And uh, if not my help and my brothers, they would starve. Doctors, after graduation, get like twelve dollars a month, like ten now and it is impossible to live on such money, that's why students are just working so hard, it's not like here, you can live on six dollars an hour, you can work for six dollars a month there and uh, a lot of them spoil their health, like I, I used to, I was in a very good position because I, I know English and so I was able to get pretty good money because language lessons are expensive and so my pretty good money was four and a

half dollars an hour, so I had six students and uh, medical school is usually six days a week from nine o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the evening and so I usually after my school, I ran to my students. And in Russia, certainly I didn't have a car, certainly I had to walk in snow and all that and so after my school, I'd grab my bag and I run to my students and actually, I earned about a hundred dollars a month which was at some point even more than my father made being an engineer and it was certainly much more than my mother made being retired and so I kind of supported my family, me and my mother, my parents are divorced.

LA: When did you come to America?

YA: I came to the United States nine months ago, no, it's already ten months ago. I came because I married an American and you want me to tell the story how I married an American? Ok, I was a medical students but I always loved English and Arts and so I finished courses of the tour guides, professional courses and I got a diploma of a tour guide around St. Petersburg and . . . different museums and um, what my first excursion was when I was eighteen and my first tourists were professors from Lenoir Rhyne College and students from Lenoir Rhyne College and um, it was my first experience and uh, I just enjoyed it very much and I became friends with these people and one girl invited me, it was the summer of 1998 to the United States and I came to visit her and she introduced me to her friend and we fell in love and we fell in love and I went away and then he said he would come and visit me in the winter and he did. He came in the winter in Russia to see me, he came for one month but when he was already in the airport with his bags to the United States, he decided not to go without me. And so he decided to stay and marry me in Russia and so he ended up being there for about three and a half months and we married and then we went to the United States together.

LA: So are you gonna live here permanently?

YA: Yeah, I am a permanent resident now.

## Yuliya Annas: Interview #2

Linda Ferguson: It is February 23, 1999. Yuliya Annas is a Russian student, going to school at Lenoir Rhyne for her pre-medical courses, is getting ready for the MCAT. I wanted to ask you what it was like to grow up in Russia.

Yuliya Annas: I had a wonderful childhood, I remember mostly only good things. Uh, my parents usually had taught me to read books rather than watch TV so I read a lot of books and I was read a lot to myself. And uh, also, I think old traditions are still pretty strong in Russian and uh, my father used to tell me a lot of stories and my mother too, just about the world and fairy tales and so I read and then at five years old, I started to read and I read to myself. And then at five, I started to study English...

LF: Was there a beach there or?

YA: No, there wasn't a beach, there was a little lake and uh, we mostly just spent time wandering around neighbors' gardens because in Russia, it's alright if you cross private property, like children, for children, we just went into different gardens and took food.

LF: Oh, how fun.

YA: And made presents for all the women there and we'd make fruit salad or something like that and carry it to the ladies.

LF: What is something that you are the most proud of?

YA: I think, what are?

LF: Anything in your life, something, anything that's happened to you that you are the most proud of or anything that you've done.

YA: I don't, I don't remember, like I think there was one event that I was very proud that I got into medical school in Russia.

LF: Mmmm.

YA: Because it was very competitive and a lot of times, teachers are bribed, examinations are bribed. And I didn't pay any money, I just worked very hard during one year, the last year of high school and I got in and really was the most exciting event in my life, I couldn't believe that I got in.

LF: (laughing) And then you ended up here.

YA: Yes.

LF: (laughing) And how did that happen, how did you immigrate to the United States?

YA: In Russia, I was also working as a tour guide because I like art and I wanted to maintain my English after high school, I wanted to keep it and develop it and so I finished the courses of tour guide and I got a professional, a licensed tour guide course in St. Petersburg and all museums around it and museums inside St. Petersburg and my first tour, tourists in my life, I was eighteen, uh, they were from Lenoir Rhyne College, [a] college professor... and some students, so we became friends and one student invited me [to visit] in the summer of 1997, I think, yeah summer 1997 and so she introduced me to her friend, Cary, and we fell in love. (laughing) And so like, what do you do and so then he came to Russia in the winter of 1998 to see me and so he wanted to stay for one month but he changed his mind and he stayed for three and a half months and we are married. So he didn't want to go away without me and (laughing).

LF: So it was easy for you to come?

YA: It wasn't very easy because I had to deal with all the bureaucrats.

LF: In Russia or here?

YA: In Russia to get immigration visa and to get married because it's a big deal to get married to a foreigner, you have to marry at a special place and there is a lot of paperwork and a lot of rude people and they want you to pay as much money as possible. So in Russia, there was



a waiting period, one month so you register and then you marry only one month, it's called confirmation...so he had to wait one month and so and then we had to wait one month to get my visa.

LF: What um, when you were in Russia, how did your family celebrate holidays or were there any special food you had or celebrations or that type of thing.

YA: Um, usually in, in Russia, holidays are very big thing, people love holidays and they celebrate them usually, not only families, like here, in the United States, there is mostly family members, in Russia it's mostly friends and family members you like and you are friends so there is not tradition just to get family together but tradition to get friends you like together. And so, usually women cook a lot of salads like, something like your potato salad is very traditional and um, mmm, just soup, fish, a lot of herring, herring with onions on top or herring salad, it's herring and then on top, it's, you put boiled grated beets and cover it all with mayonnaise and that's, it's very good. And um, there's always, usually in Russia, people do drink but in my family, we never drink...but usually during the holiday, there is a bottle vodka for men and uh, there's champagne and wine for, for women from, I know there's been a lot of times here, there's a lot of times with almost all holidays in my new family we're without any alcohol (laughing) and um, there, there's always alcohol but really nobody drinks to get drunk, just for company spirit.

LF: Right, right.

YA: People in our family, a lot of times, they would sing, my father likes to sing and he would sing songs and uh, we would always dance. Like, but I notice the difference, here people don't dance, the young people my age, like twenty, twenty-one, they just sit.

LF: Really?

YA: And I think what's the fun of the whole holiday? In Russia, the, the combination of the holiday is dancing.

LF: Right.

YA: That's what it's made for, to dance like that. And so, especially young people and old, old, not always, but young people always dance.

LF: Well that sounds a lot of, like a lot of fun. And when you were getting ready to come to live in the U.S., what did you think it was going to be like?

YA: Um, the thing is that I already visited the United States and so that, as far as just everything, I thought that it would be easier to get into the medical school, I thought I would be able to transfer or at least I would not have to go to college, but just to go, go straight to the medical school.

LF: Mmmm.

YA: But I had to go to the college and so I thought there was a lot of bureaucracy because um, like anatomy of an American and anatomy of a Russian don't differ. So I don't think there, there should be a problem on coming from another country to go to straight to the medical school. Especially as I've already had four years of the medical school and I go back to college but I think it's fun.

LF: What do you think is good about Russia, I mean.

YA: I think now is good that, it's very difficult to think what's good in Russia now, I think it's good that we still have one of the best buildings in the whole world, it's still good that we have wonderful architecture, wonderful art, wonderful museums, and it's good that our culture hasn't [been] ruined forever. It's very good that now there is a tendency to revive religion and all of the buildings are restored or built, the churches. It's good that there is also a tendency remember the classical traditions and it's good that we don't have communists anymore.

LF: Uh huh. And so what kind of traditions was it?

YA: Folk, folk?

LF: Folk tradition, yeah, oh ok.

YA: Just folk tradition, folk arts and um, the way we celebrate the Easter and the Passover like with the eggs and with the special cooking and the church and we have Easter Lily Sunday and so brunch is at Easter Lily.

LF: Mmmm, yeah.

YA: We get, give them to everybody during the Sunday and that, usually people go and visit the graves of their relatives.

LF: Mmmm. What do you think is bad about Russia?

YA: I think that now the most part of it is bad because the communists are bad, dollar increased dramatically, the ruble increased four or five times? But people still get the same about from rubles but all prices usually go according to dollars and so when dollar goes up, it used to be six rubles when I left Russia, not dollar is twenty-four rubles and so all prices in rubles are according to the course of dollar but people still get the same, the same amount of rubles. And so, my mother used to get sixty dollars retirement per months, and now she gets fifteen dollars for one month, after working as an engineer for thirty-five years and my father was just fired after working at the same place for thirty-eight years and he been one of the best engineers and he gets also fifteen dollars a month retirement.

LF: Oh my goodness.

YA: And so there's a lot of people lost their jobs... and people go to the streets and they don't know what to do. They have either to sell something or to starve or I know, we don't have choices of work and also, they are going to have to [release] a hundred thousand prisoners away, let them go because they don't have food for them.

LF: Well how do you think that it could be helped? Do you think the United States could do anything to help Russia?

YA: I don't think that anybody can do anything to help Russia because the markup on the [ruble], aid has to be huge to help such a huge country, it's like every American

would have to every month, contribute ten dollars to help Russia, something like that (laughing) because it's like a drop of water in the ocean the amount of help we have. And but the main problem is that it doesn't get to where it has to get so people who distribute it get it and then resale it or they take it for themselves. And...we have a lot of loans from the United States and they give Europe and Russia millions of dollars, millions, several millions of dollars but they just pay and it disappears because they get stolen by government planners, Mafia, whoever...and it's terrible.

LF: What do you think is good about the US?

YA: I think that it's good, first it's good that everybody has equal opportunity as far as America is concerned.

LF: Mmmm.

YA: I don't have equal opportunity because I'm from Russia.

LF: Uh huh.

YA: But still and uh, you can, if you work hard you can achieve what you want, like everywhere else, but you are here, you also will be paid with a decent and you can support your family and have a house and just live like a normal person.

LF: Mmmm.

YA: Umm, but uh, I think that it's all good and that there is a lot of help for homeless people here and things like the Salvation Army and Medicaid and just the, almost everybody uh, gets taken care of and everything is very good.

LF: Uh huh. And what do you think is bad about the US?

YA: Mmm, I think, I think that my main concerns about things here is probably about education because first time I've been here, the level of for example biology...I mean, just the level of classes, is a lot times like my middle school in Russia.

LF: Mmmm.

YA: High school is like really below the level of high school... it seems like lot of people look at me, looks a lot, but teachers like to over-simplify as if they are afraid that students will get bad grades and fail so I didn't like that, I think teacher has to challenge all the time.

LF: Mmmm.

YA: Study more and uh also, it's strange that, for example when the breaks between classes, sometimes I would sit and nobody would talk in the room in some classes and I am so surprised, they are young people my age why won't they talk and joke and just feel alive?

LF: Mmmm.

YA: Because in Russia, there was not a single break where we would not be laughing so loud the windows would be shaking all the time.

LF: Uh huh.

YA: And people we don't know would just get acquainted right away and talking and laughing and joking so I laugh, I want, I want fun.

LF: Mmmm.

YA: More fun, it's simple.

LF: Uh huh, uh huh.

YA: (laughing).

LF: Is there um, besides getting into medical school, in Russia, is there any other special event that happened in your life that you want to talk about?

YA: I think that, I don't, there were a lot of events in my life there in Russia with my friends but it's not a very different thing from the United States. A Russian person cannot live without friends. It's a lot of, there is a lot of strain in the fellowship, it's not just hi, how are you, ok,

it's not like that, it's usually more of your friends for a lifetime and you know everything about them, all of their life and you share everything and so I used to go to dance rock and roll with my friends I used to go, have parties with my friends to have meeting together and we would always dance and my friends were very intelligent people who were going to be like (biologists?) mathematicians, and uh, work in colleges here and somebody would always talk and we could always challenge each other to develop mentally because we always we shared books, like if I know this is a good book, I would pass it to my friend and go over the afternoon or go to the theaters together and so without that, you have to depart with the childhood. We taught each other a lot so everything is wonderful and also, I'm just, in general I'm very pleased that my parents brought me up in a way that I know, not that I know a lot of things, but I am certainly acquainted to a lot of areas like I'm going to be a doctor and I know a lot of biology and chemistry, physics and all of that, but I also know a lot of art because my mother taught me to love art and and culture and I'm a tour guide and also I read all the time during my, when I was a teenager and like from tenth through twenties... I read Old English classics old Russian, German, Japanese, Chinese, so but I'm, I have a lot of knowledge over the rest of my life knowing history because I know more, makes the life fuller and different when you understand more things and I think it's wonderful and I am very grateful to my parents, the way they brought me up.

IY: Mmmm. So what is next for you as far as your student life um,

YA: Um, I'm just going

IY: here?

YA: I look forward to a time when maybe I'll make more friends just um, to be young again because I feel like I'm old because I don't live on campus and when you don't live on campus, you don't get to know a lot of people and when you are apart from all the simple young things like parties and talking about discussing somebody, you know

IY: uh huh.

YA: So I just, I really, I want the simple things and also I'm married so here it's strange when people, I say I'm married they kind of, we cannot be friends if I am married.

LY: Right.

YA: But, but I think we can, I think it's a lot I can, you know, my husband is also my boyfriend. So I'm, I'm looking forward to when I have the simple fun and the students life that I don't have and secondly I am looking forward when I get into medical school and just finally become what I want to become and help people.

LY: Well thank you very much, I appreciate that.

YA: Thank you very much, it was fun.

## **Uzma Zakai interviewed by Michelle Baity**

Uzma Zakai is a Pakistani student at Lenoir-Rhyne College. She was born in Saudi Arabia where her father was an expatriate accountant. While residing in Saudi Arabia, she witnessed the Gulf War from a child's perspective. Since coming to Lenoir-Rhyne she has been very involved in human rights work and is an active member of Amnesty International.

Michelle Baity: Ok, it is February 28, 1999 and we are at Lenoir-College. I am interviewing Uzma Zakai. How long have you been in Hickory?

Uzma Zakai: Um, I'd say nearly two months.

MB: Do you like it here?

UZ: I find the community atmosphere very welcoming and becoming and I have not felt as if though I were in danger perhaps as I might have been in a city like New York or something.

MB: Mmmm. What do you like most about Hickory?

UZ: Umm. The city itself.

MB: Really? Have you gotten a chance to like go out and look at it?

UZ: No, I meant that it is the city itself.

MB: Yeah.

UZ: Yeah. Um, I think that Hickory offers a quiet place for a college and it's nice and yet its still in the midst of so many awesome cities like Asheville and um, a lot of historical sites.

MB: Yeah. Where else have you been?

UZ: Um, I've lived, I was born in Saudi Arabia.

MB: Mmmm.

UZ: In 1980? And I have lived there basically all of my life and in the summer we usually visit our family, which is back in Pakistan. And um, I went to high school for three years in Austria.

MB: Wow.

UZ: In 1995 to 98.

MB: Hmm. Well what is a typical day like in Pakistan?

UZ: Uh, there's usually not a typical day, it can range from a very radical strike . . . there's ethical groups fighting each other and um, chaos basically, to a very serene environment where um, there's family is basically the base of your family, your life and everything is determined by your extended family, extensive family, which determines your goals, your everything you want to do in life is your family. They, they matter a lot to you.

MB: Hmm. Well um, how did you manage to like move and go to high school in Austria?

UZ: (laughing) Um, actually at the ninth grade in Saudi, um, till 1995 we did not have high schools to the twelfth grade but they do now, but um I had a choice of going back to Pakistan or studying um, at schools which were further away from my home. But I was lucky to get a scholarship to Austria.

MB: Oh wow, what did you study there? Like what were the courses like?

UZ: Um, I studied it was basically a high school but they had a intricate system of European standard setting there so they introduced the International Baccalaureate program, which is really like the AP but its a two year course that is the first year of college, I guess.

MB: Mmmm.

UZ: And um, so I took some IB [International Baccalaureate] courses and some AP [Advanced Placement] Courses my junior year and senior years of various



subjects like biology and history and literature. And um, it was basically a high school for tenth through twelfth grade.

MB: Oh. So how did you manage to get to Lenoir-Rhyne?

UZ: Oh, I had friends in Austria, two friends, two guy friends, my best friends, and they were from Hickory.

MB: Really? Oh

UZ: And they told me when I was applying ...no matter what, I should consider L-R as one of my choices whether I wanted to go or not, whether I thought it was feasible or not, and it seemed totally radical and out of the place and I applied only because they told me to apply and after I had applied and I heard my responses, responses, it just seemed more and more feasible moment by moment.

MB: Oh. Well what do you think of the people here?

UZ: I think this is one of the friendliest and most open schools I've ever gone to in my whole life.

MB: Are they like a lot different from other people like in Pakistan and Austria?

UZ: Yes.

MB: Yes? Well how?

UZ: Um, one of the things that really struck me when I came here was um, how open everybody is very open as in they tell you their life, their, their personal perspectives, their personal histories, some stuff you may not even want to know and sometimes you just wonder why are you telling me this? Where, whereas back at home, we just have a hard time even getting somebody to say where they are from or what part of the city they live in and so, even, even the part of the city can connote what ethical group they belong to because um, different, different radical parts of the government live in selected parts of the areas of the east. And if they tell you which part of the city they live in, you can sort of {understand} which part of the government they are from. And even

among students it can cause like fights and stuff. So its like compared to something like that, I come here and its like I don't want to know what happened with your boyfriend yesterday.

MB: (laughing) So you went to school in Pakistan, right?

UZ: Um, no, I went to school in Saudi Arabia until ninth grade.

MB: Uh huh, well what was it like, what were the courses like?

UZ: Um, it was basically an international American sort of school ...until ninth grade. Most of the teachers were very backwards. Some of them were from the States, some of them were from Great Britain, um, some were European and some were Japanese .

MB: Was it like hard to learn from the, a lot of different teachers?

UZ: Um, Actually I think that was the best part of my life. Because my, the students in my class, well most of my schools have always been from like, from all over the world so since I was really little, I grew to understand and appreciate diversity.

MB: Mmmm.

UZ: And I guess that's helped me out a lot. And today, like, I guess I can say at the age of eighteen, I would feel comfortable talking to anyone from all corners, um, from all corners of the world.

MB: Do you have a big family?

UZ: Um, my um, immediate family, no, its only four, my dad, my mommy and my sister but my extensive family is huge.

MB: What do you mean by your extensive family?

UZ: Um, as in my mom's mother and her family, my dad's whole family.

MB: Are you really close?

UZ: Yes. It, its very close-knit. Like my future, my aspirations are their aspirations. Their aspirations are my aspirations. Its like we live and interconnect as a body encouraging each other in, its an awesome thing because if, if I fail or if I, if I, if I don't have the money today to do something, they will always be there, no matter what, they will be there because its their obligation and my dad's brothers are like my second dads, my mother's sisters are like my second moms. That's how close we are.

MB: Is it like that in every family? Or?

UZ: Most of the families in the eastern lands and what I mean by that is um, the subcontinent of India, which includes countries like um, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and um Burma.

MB: Well when you went to school and stuff, what did ya'll used to do for fun?

UZ: In Saudi Arabia, we had um, a lot of opportunities to go to the desert on the weekends and campout at, um, oh, if it wasn't too hot, that is. Um, one of the cool things we got to do, well it wasn't cool, I guess, but um, I was there during the Gulf War so you know how people usually have recess and break to like go out and just skip around and stuff, you know, kids? Well when I was in um, sixth or seventh grade, our recess was like training to how to use the gas mask and playing with gas masks, and um, it was, it was an experience, and um, my baseball coaches during that year were guys from the Navy and the U.S. Marines. It was scary and awesome.

MB: What did everybody think about the war in Saudi Arabia?

UZ: Um, at first everybody thought it was a hoax, it was a big joke. Nothing would happen, this guy Saddam Hussein... that was a hoax. Nobody thought, believed him or anything but then as the day grew nearer, as the bombs um, started falling, my Dad um, was fifty meters away from the bomb when it exploded near Saudi Arabia,

um, it became a reality. It, it hit us, you know, there was a war going on. And there was panic, there was turmoil and it was something I had never undergone in my life and I hope I never will.

MB: Was it really scary like intensive danger?

UZ: It was, it was. Um, people, I mean like, just the environment, the flora and fauna sort of just laid back. Because you'd go, you would go to the beach and literally, they were black covered in tar and oil and you could peel out, pull out with your hands, like bird stuffed in oil and like in the tar, sort of like stuffed them and made them like statues and you could just pick fishes out, covered with tar.

MB: Oh, that's so sad. Did it like, did the war ruin a lot of the economy and of Saudi Arabia?

UZ: Yes. I mean um, since the expatriates found the oil inside Saudi Arabia, we never had to pay taxes and we had um, educational benefits and loads and lots of things which makes Saudi Arabia such a benefit for expatriates to come and after that year, we have never been able to say that the land is a rich land, you know?

MB: Did that have anything to do with you moving away to high school in Austria?

UZ: Um, no. Actually from the beginning to the end, I could never have afforded Austria, I was just really lucky I got a scholarship there.

MB: Oh, what does your family think about you moving all around?

UZ: Oh, well um, when I was in ninth grade and I was leaving for tenth grade in Austria, I told me mom, after twelfth grade, I am not leaving home again, I graduate, I come back home. And, and that's how they thought about it and but um, I guess its not whether they want it, parents don't really want to kick their kids out anyways, you know, but I guess it was really more of a choice of it's not the world I'm traveling to, but rather its a place where I can live safely I'm traveling to. When I was going

to go to college in Pakistan because I had not gotten my Visa to come here in time in the fall, and I was going to apply to some Universities in Pakistan because I wasn't sure if I was going to come here or not um, one of the days, I was coming back by a local bus route and when I was coming back to my grandmother's house there, there were these kids, twenty years old, nineteen, twenty years old guys, shooting people, civilians, on the street. And I was nearly killed, I mean, I am lucky I am alive today talking to you here.

MB: Oh.

UZ: And it was, it was an experience that, it doesn't matter if I'm a mile or fifty miles away from my home now, it's more their concern about my safety.

MB: So it's really dangerous in Saudi Arabia?

UZ: You mean in Pakistan.

MB: Oh, in Pakistan, yeah.

UZ: Yeah because last year for the first time they exploded the nuclear bombs because there's a rivalry going on in Kashmir in whether it belongs in India or Pakistan and um, since the nuclear bombs have exploded, ethnic [ethnic] groups have you could say sparked up even more.

MB: Mmmm. Are there a lot of tourists in like Pakistan?

UZ: Um, there used to be until like nineteen, there still are but they're really used to the, Kashmir was, for example considered the Paris of the East.

MB: Mmmm.

UZ: Or actually, [Beirut] was but it was, it was amongst those Budapest/Paris cities, you know? And they were, it was, it was the paradise of the east, actually. And um, it was beautiful, people came, Kashmir, everybody knew about Kashmir, it, it won Nobel Awards, the beauty of, the glamour, you know? And today, there, these two nations have basically torn apart a Haven.

MB: Mmm, have you ever been there, to Kashmir?

UZ: Yes. I've been up to the Pakistani side of Kashmir, we own half of Kashmir and um, when I was there, actually I was there, um, in ah, this last October... And when we were staying in Kashmir, in the distance, we could hear the troops with their um, guns, firing at each other.

MB: Mm, that's scary. (laughing) Did you, did ya'll feel like you were in potential danger

UZ: Um, we knew they were at a very far distance, but we could, we could see like ashes and smoke blow up into the sky but we, we didn't go up to the border, which is where everything is occurring, we only stayed to a very close vicinity of Pakistan, I guess.

MB: Well did ya'll do anything for like safety measures for like extra safety.

UZ: Um, it's a country where when you express safety, you express that you have money.

MB: Oh.

UZ: And when you express that you have safety and money, people go to you even more, so it's best to actually fit into the crowd rather than show off who you are. Because um, for example, if there's a car with like a bunch of policemen and two or three girls inside it, they will know those kids belong to important people and if they ransom, you know ransom them money and stuff like that, it's crazy place.

MB: What's the government like?

UZ: It's, it's very chaotic. Even though we have restored some peace and order, during this year, but in, in the past it has been very chaotic because it's been, it's been a battle of um, you could say family in the past years, it's been a battle of um, a family trying to get back with another family, sort of like Romeo and Juliet.

MB: Um, you had a sister, did you say?

UZ: Yes.

MB: Um, how old is she?

UZ: She's thirteen.

MB: Are ya'll really close?

UZ: Yeah.

MB: Um, what did ya'll used to do when you were like younger?

UZ: Oh um, I, we have a five year age difference so there wasn't much I could say to her as in very closeness or but I mean, I played with her, she played with me, I've always been there, I've always been there for her and she's always been there for me and it's just, I can, I can see for like ten, twenty, thirty, fifty years from now, we always be close and for each other, I guess.

MB: It's like the whole closeness of the family thing.

UZ: Yeah.

MB: Well that's good. Well um, have you met many like families here in Hickory? Or?

UZ: Yes I have.

MB: Well how are they different?

UZ: Um, I've been lucky enough to meet a lot of community members.

MB: Mmmm.

UZ: Who have long been established themselves here... I guess Hickory community long established families, but um, in general, though, one thing I've noticed is the detachedness of American families in general. And that struck me as not being good or bad, it's just something different I've never seen before.

MB: What are the class differences in Saudi Arabia? Like

how are they divided and what does that mean to the community?

UZ: In Saudi Arabia, there isn't a lot of class differences because um, its a rich country, they've got the oil and um, so even the Saudi um, illiterate men, average boy men would be given a job as a jailer, police, even if you were illiterate and you would be getting a pretty good salary as in perhaps per month at least \$1000, which is not bad at all, considering all he does is sit there. (laughter) And um, so theres not a, the lowest class, there's not a lot of poverty in Saudi Arabia yet, but there will be within fifty years because oil is a non-renewable resource.

MB: Mmmm.

UZ: And um, but the rich people are really rich. (laughing) It's not even funny, they are very rich. Like the long, um, the decades of the monarchy of King Faud and his regime have long held the monarchy and have long mastered the resources of Saudi Arabia, I guess.

MB: I want to know about the war. Like how did that change your day, did it change it in any way?

UZ: Like um, you know how Saturday and Sunday are weekends here?

MB: Mmmm.

UZ: Well we have Thursday and Friday as our weekends in Saudi. And I remember it because um, like a day before school, you would get a call from your principal or at least a school official saying it's dangerous to come to school today, there might be something going on, there might be a bomb coming in today, we don't know, it's very insecure, do not come to school today. And so we ended up going to school on like Thursdays and Fridays like Saturday and Sunday equivocal and it was, it was really weird because like it was a year I have to admit I enjoyed the most because we did no work (laughing) but it was a scary experience. Because even though we were kids, we were having fun with these gas masks and like places were surrounded with them, we knew something within us, like kid's intuition, I guess something horrible



was in the air and there wasn't the levity of every day teacher... Like we would not be having fun with our teachers, we would not, there was so much tension in the air, it always felt like there was a barrier between the kids and the school environment who are usually all interconnected.

MB: Ahh, did it directly, or hurt your family directly?

UZ: It did, directly?

MB: Directly. Like did it affect your family life?

UZ: Um, yeah. Like my dad was very afraid and there was a shortage of labor because even though it is a time of turmoil and everyone wants get out of the country, there were, people needed [to] work, they needed, for the jet planes, the ships, the, because we were Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia was providing all of the oil and the fuel and the money for um, the U.S. Marines and what um, combat troops to fight so we could, the companies were actually on high capacity work and so they needed the work force, yet the work force wanted to get out. So um, and we were so afraid, we were praying because my family, my mother, me and my sister left for Pakistan but my dad was not able to leave because the work force shortage. And so it was like, when I left, a couple of days later, we found out that my dad was near a bomb, fifty meters away from it and we were praying because tomorrow we may not even see my dad again, ever alive, you know?

MB: How did that affect your family when you split up?

UZ: Well, we never enjoyed a single day of it.

MB: How long were you split up?

UZ: Um, about, I would say three weeks to a month, yeah, when things actually started to calm down and all the peace, of course started getting to and from.

MB: When you went to Pakistan, did you start off immediately like for a new life?

UZ: No um, we weren't sure, my Dad told us that he would be there within three weeks, no matter what and he said that if things didn't settle down, he would um, get us admission into Pakistani schools and stuff. But we weren't sure how long the war was going to last if there was a war at all and what impact it would have on us if we would come back to Saudi Arabia or not but within three weeks, we had final and definite answers and I guess we were moving back to Saudi Arabia.

MB: So you did go back?

UZ: Yeah.

MB: Oh, so how long did you stay in Pakistan?

UZ: Um, three weeks to a month.

MB: And so that's the only time you've ever been to Pakistan?

UZ: Oh no, we go about, basically every summer.

MB: Oh ok, kind of like a vacation?

UZ: Yeah.

MB: What was your vacations like as a child?

UZ: Um, well it was really exciting because no matter what, every summer, you knew you were going to go back and see your grandma and your grandfather and all of your family and see all these tons of young kids who were born when you have been away. And it, it was something exciting, it was something I look forward to and I love the receiving the attention I got when I went back and it was an awesome experience.

MB: How long did it last usually?

UZ: The summer vacation. School gets out for three months so we usually go for about a month, a month and a half even though my Dad comes back early because he has to work.



MB: Oh. So how long is your school year?

UZ: Um, basically the average American school year because it was an American International school set up in Saudi Arabia.

MB: Oh is it all people go there?

UZ: Um, basically all the expatriates who are not Saudi, um, of course expatriates are not Saudi go there.

MB: Oh well what's the other schools like, are they small or big?

UZ: The, uh the rest of the schools are local Arabic schools and we can't go there because we don't know Arabic as fluently.

MB: Oh, did like you know English, is that your first language?

UZ: Since I was born in Saudi Arabia, so since I was real small, um, I got admissions into these International schools, they, they are like community schools, they are very small and the community members who are whoever they are, whether they are British or American, they set them up and um, so since I was four, since Kindergarten, I went to these schools, so I learned English as my native language, I guess.

MB: Oh, are the teachers like certified in these little open schools?

UZ: Um, yes.

MB: They are? Oh um, what are you majoring in? Here?

UZ: So far, biology but I don't know.

MB: Really? Well what affected or influenced your decision on what to major in?

UZ: I guess um, this past semester, which I missed out and I was in Pakistan, it, it really um, it struck me, it aggravated me that lives were just being killed while

blood was shot here and there and these numbers were becoming statistics and piling up and piling up and it struck me that each member, each body that was lying out there belonged to a family. A family who had aspirations, love, and goals just like you and me. And um, there were so many things, um, my Aunts mother for example, just recently, she got Hepatitis C, which is a disease which you get if you are injected with a diseased um, syringe. So if the doctor did not change syringes, you can get this disease. And that was just like thanks doctors for just giving me a disease in which I did not even have it in the first place, it is just a cause of carelessness in the hospitals. And I really, I think that this last semester has sort of changed me because I, I feel that a light side of me has been cleared because I've seen so much in this past semester that I've grown to love humankind no matter what their problems may be. No matter how cynical they may be towards life, there's, God gave life to every human being because that human being was important to God. And I believe that life is not something that should be wasted, put on the streets, streets red with the blood. It, it's, it's special, it's sacred. And I want to help humankind.

MB: What are your hospitals like? (laughing) In Saudi Arabia?

UZ: Oh, in, what the picture I was describing to you right now was in Pakistan.

MB: Oh, ok so

UZ: Saudi Arabian hospitals are very up to date, they're, they're your average American hospital because um, Saudi Arabia has basically been given birth to by expatriates who came from all over the world and so it's built into a mini Great Britain, a mini America, a mini whatever.

MB: Well what are they like in Pakistan?

UZ: Um, because of the money shortage, because of the so-called developing Third World country, um, there's not enough money and so some hospitals which are the public clinic and hospitals are just bare hospitals, you

could say. Are just the bare needs and bare staff and bare things and um, so if you are a peasant, of which, 80 percent of the people are, um, you go to these and sometimes you end up with more diseases than you went into it with.

MB: Yeah.

UZ: And only twenty percent or less of the population has access to the good private hospitals.

MB: And so the rest of them have to go to the poor ones?

UZ: Mmmm.

MB: You said your Dad was a laborer, is that what you said?

UZ: No, he's an accountant.

MB: Oh, in Saudi Arabia now?

UZ: Yes.

MB: Ok, (laughing) well um, are you, how is religion, how is religion where you've grown up?

UZ: Um, I'm a Muslim

MB: Mmmm.

UZ: And I believe in the my faith and um, you could say that I'm a moderate Muslim as in, first of all, I have so much to learn about my faith that I am even shy of calling myself a Muslim because there is so much I have to learn that I don't know how um, sticky I could be, how adhesive I am to my religion, but um, I do believe in God and a prophet and all of that.

MB: Is your family believing? Is it real religious?

UZ: (pause) Um, in faith, yes. I guess you could describe them as moderate religious.

MB: Do you have churches and stuff?

UZ: We have mosques, which are like churches.

MB: What's the, can you tell the difference is there?

UZ: Mosques it, just as a church is a room of place for the holy worship for God, a mosque for Muslims is a room of holy worship for God. So these churches um, they have these um, Minarets, these long Minarets and the prayers, the five prayers of the day are um, said by a leader of the mosque and he comes to the mosque five times a day and he um, speaks out, come to prayer, come to prayer, in Arabic and then he says the prayers and all the people come five times a day, the men go there and for woman, um, the house is actually a place of worship.

## **Pahoua Moua interviewed by Rachel “Susie” Barkley**

Pahoua is Hmong and came to the United States when she was a child. The Hmong worked covertly with the CIA to help the US soldiers during the Vietnam War. Her parents moved here in response to the way the Hmong were treated by the Vietnamese after the U.S. pulled out.

Susie Barkley: Today is January the 14<sup>th</sup>, 1999, and Pahoua Moua is to be interviewed. Pahoua is from Hiddenite, NC, and she is going to tell us something about herself. [pause] Pahoua, tell, first tell us your name.

Pahoua Moua: Ok, my name is Pahoua Moua and I am from, originally from Laos. I am a wife and I have a couple of children.

SB: A couple?

PM: Yeah, a couple of children.

SB: oh, how many?

PM: Six children.

SB: And their names are?

PM: And their, well, their name are Diana, Roseanna, Angela, Crystal, Virginia, and Maxson.

SB: Ok, and where were they born?

PM: Well, they, well, the first four older one are born in Long Beach, California, and for my two youngest one are born in North Carolina.

SB: Ok, in Taylorsville or Alexander County?

PM: Um, in Statesville.

SB: Statesville, all right. So and do you um, do anything special with your children?

PM: Well, I try to help them with English and with their homework in school.

SB: Ok, um, what about your husband, where does he work?

PM: He's a mechanic, he work at the Emerald Chrysler dealership in Hiddenite.

SB: Ok, I have heard a story about his lunchtime experiences, tell us about that.

PM: Lunchtime experiences?

SB: Doesn't he bring

PM: Well, he usually come home for lunch every afternoon because he has one, an hour of lunch.

SB: But doesn't he bring friends?

PM: Yes. He brought, he bring his friends and his, I think his supervisor from work to have lunch with him. I think maybe two, twice a week or maybe once a week.

SB: Because?

PM: Because they love to taste our food.

SB: So describe your food.

PM: Well, I usually cook eggroll, fried chicken wings or legs, and salad and also rice.

SB: Do you ever make an oriental rice or do you just use white rice?

PM: White rice and sometimes fried rice.

SB: Ok, how many pounds of rice do you usually cook a week?

PM: A week? [laughter] I don't, well, we usually buy a hundred pound bag of rice, it lasts about one and a half months, right? But for a week, I don't know, because I usually measure it in cups, right? I don't know.

SB: It's a lot.

PM: A lot, but I don't know how many pounds.  
[laughter]

SB: Well Pahoua is a good cook, so you cook your way, your, your style, which is the, the Hmong culture, why is that, what is that different from the, um, the say, the Vietnamese or the Chinese, how is it different?

PM: How is it different? I think that we, well, we speak differently, we don't understand each other and our food is different.

SB: Ok, do you have any idea why, how it's different, what you use that's different?

PM: I, I don't have no idea, but I know that the food is different.

SB: Ok, do you remember your country?

PM: Remember my country?

SB: Uh huh, You were a child when you came to America.

PM: When I came here, so yeah, I, I don't remember that much about my country.

SB: Ok, what about your parents?

PM: My parents, yes, I think they do remember.

SB: Ok, are they still alive?

PM: Yes.

SB: Ok, in California?

PM: Yeah, they live in [Banning] California.

SB: Ok, so do you talk to them often?

PM: Sometime.

SB: Ok.

PM: Maybe once a month or twice a month.

SB: All right, are they um, well? Um.

PM: Yeah, they are doing well.

SB: Ok, do you have brothers and sisters?

PM: Yes, I have three sister, and two brother.

SB: Are they here?

PM: No, they live with my parents in California.

SB: How did you meet your husband?

PM: Yeah, that's a good story, but well, I don't know, he has some friend that he, he, um, had to stop by [Banning], right, to visit, so well, I don't know, we just kind of meet in my cousins house when he stopped by my cousin's place, so that's how we meet.

SB: So your cousin got you together.

PM: Not quite.

SB: So how long did you know each other before you married?

PM: Maybe two weeks.

SB: Oh, ok.

PM: It's a short time, but I don't know why.

SB: Just love at first sight, huh, do you understand that?



PM: Mmm, yeah, but I'm not sure, I'm not sure  
[laughter]

SB: Ok. Um, let's see, tell me about school that you  
remember in California.

PM: School.

SB: You went to school in California before you came  
here.

PM: Yes, yes, uh huh, I went to school. Well, when I,  
when I lived with my parent, there are lots of Hmong  
people that I go through school with, but after when I got  
married, right? I went to a school where, well, I usually, I  
go to school where teenager go, but after when I got my  
first child, right? I go to [Reed] High School where there  
are woman that are having children or kids go.

SB: Mmhmm. Oh, ok, so you went back to school even  
after having your first child.

PM: yeah, but after

SB: How old were you when you married?

PM: Fifteen.

SB: Oh, ok

PM: At a young age, I don't, I don't know why, but

SB: You are not very old now, but you have been married  
most of your life.

PM: Yeah, I don't know why.

SB: Well, love, you know? Ok, um, what uh, what  
created the need to come to North Carolina, or why did  
you decide to come to North Carolina?

PM: Oh, why? Well, we, we been in a big city, right?  
Long Beach

SB: Mmhmm.

PM: where there's not much work, and it's so crowded  
with people and crime, right? So we wanted to move out  
to a place where there is more peace and quiet and there  
are more jobs.

SB: Ok, and in Taylorsville you found that?

PM: Mmhmm, yeah.

SB: Did someone you know already, was someone  
already here that you knew?

PM: Yeah, I have a aunt and an uncle that live in  
Morganton.

SB: Uh huh.

PM: That I knew, so well, Teng took a vacation for two  
weeks to come over to North Carolina, right? And check  
out the place and stuff, if he like it, and then after that, he  
decided that it's a good place for us to start a new life and  
a place where there's more peace and quiet.

SB: Ok, and do you find that that, that was true?

PM: Yes, uh huh.

SB: Less, less.

PM: Less crime, less people. Less traffic, right?

SB: Yes, traffic.

PM: And more peace.

SB: Uh huh. Ok. Um, you feel at home here now?

PM: Well, sometime

SB: Ok.

PM: Sometime.

SB: You don't remember your country very much.

PM: Yeah, but I, I have seen the um, video that people have been to our country today? Yeah, so they have to take some.

SB: So you do get to see?

PM: Yeah, in video.

SB: What, what do you remember, do you remember anything from your country?

PM: My country, no.

SB: Even that your parents would have told you about?

PM: I didn't ask, I didn't ask them what it looks like, right? So um,

SB: What about anything that happened there? I mean, why they left?

PM: Oh, why they left? Yes, because, because of the war, right? We couldn't stay in our country so have to leave because of the war.

SB: Mmhmm, do you think you will go back to your country some day?

PM: Yes, to visit.

SB: To visit?

PM: Yeah, when my kids are older.

SB: This is home now then?

PM: Yes.

SB: This will be the home for your kids [phone ring]

PM: Yeah, for my kids, yeah for my kids and for myself too. But I think I will be back and visit my country in the future.

SB: I hope I still know you so you will bring me pictures to see.

PM: I'll send you picture.

SB: Ok, I would like to see your pictures, I would like to see your country, myself. It has changed, I'm sure since your family has left, but it's still

PM: (overlapping) Yeah, yes, well, yeah, our country, well, the climate and everything is kind of like North Carolina.

SB: So you would be at home, climate wise.

PM: Yeah,

SB: Ok, do um, do, do you remember the city that parents lived in before, or or the area, the name of the area?

PM: The area, well, no. I, I don't have no idea of that

SB: You were awfully young.

PM: I, I was, I was too young to remember that.

SB: How old were you?

PM: I think five or six.

SB: Ok, ok. So

PM: I couldn't remember.

[pause in the tape]

SB: Ok, we will continue Pahoua. Anything you can remember about your um, life, just your life period, since you have been here?

PM: My life, I don't know.

SB: What kind of dreams have you had for your children?

PM: Well I dream that they can have a better future than I do because they are born in the United States, right?

SB: Ok.

PM: And as a citizen, I dream that they could have a better job, speak more English, right? Do much much better than I did.

SB: Ok, you are doing fine, keep going.

PM: Yeah, but well, I don't know what I was saying thanks.

SB: Well you are doing fine, uh, anything you'd like to say that you remember from Taylorsville, uh, have you made um, Sarah, give us some questions, get Pahoua to talk.

PM: Mmm, I can't talk.

SB: You are doing an excellent job, she just doesn't think she is. [speaking to a third person] She's telling me about her, uh, she doesn't remember living in Loas.

[third person] What's the best thing about living here in North Carolina and the United States?

SB: Yeah, think about that for a minute and I'll turn the tape back on and you can answer we'll ask it again, and what else? What else do you think would be good to ask? She's telling me why they came, there was the war and we all understand that, I mean, if you study history. By the way, Pahoua, a lot of our Americans, they are going to take these, by the way, and put them together with all of them, we are trying to show that we are all different and yet we are all the same. We have dreams for our kids and my dreams for my kids are the same as yours, by the way, only it doesn't have to deal with the language, but it did have to deal with them going on and making better for themselves and that kind of thing. So that's true, and so you know, along that way, anything you can think of?

[third person]: Yeah, and how you still want to, you want your children to still keep the culture or do you want them to pick up the American ways?

SB: That's a good question, the question is, let me ask

this question, Pahoua, I've got the tape on. Um, would you, are you teaching your culture to you children so they understand they have two backgrounds, they have their um, heritage from your country and from America. What are you doing to do that?

PM: Well, I, I am still teaching them my culture

SB: Ok.

PM: I don't want them to lose our heritage, right?

SB: Ok, right, so what are you doing to teach them your culture?

PM: Well, I'm trying to ask them to remember everything that our people does, right? To wear our kind of clothes on New Year, right?

SB: Uh huh.

PM: And to speak the language at home, but they can also speak English when they are in school, right?

SB: Uh huh.

PM: But at home, they are suppose to speak our language, because in that way, they can be able to keep our yeah, heritage because I don't want them to lose it.

SB: Oh, ok, let me just stop, Pahoua. Pahoua, do you remember anything your parents would have told you about their past in your country?

PM: No, I didn't ask them, right? I didn't ask them and so well, they didn't,

SB: They didn't talk about much?

PM: No, they didn't talk about it.

SB: Ok, what um, what would they have done

[Interview ends here]



# Conclusion

So what have we learned from these oral histories? Clearly the Catawba Valley has been transformed in the recent two decades. Moreover, we must all come to accept change that is irreversible. If anything, greater challenges await us in the future. The old cultural norm of a white majority and black minority no longer exists. Hispanic and Asian communities have come to play a vital role in our community. Other groups, including gays, lesbians, the disabled, and the working poor have a voice that deserves to be heard as well. If we can look at what we have in common and openly discuss our differences, the best may be yet to come. In the sharing process, most people find they have more in common than different, and the difference is what makes it interesting. Diversity is not something to be feared, but celebrated. It should not be a source of division, but of strength.

We hope you have learned a bit more about your community through this sample of interviews.



